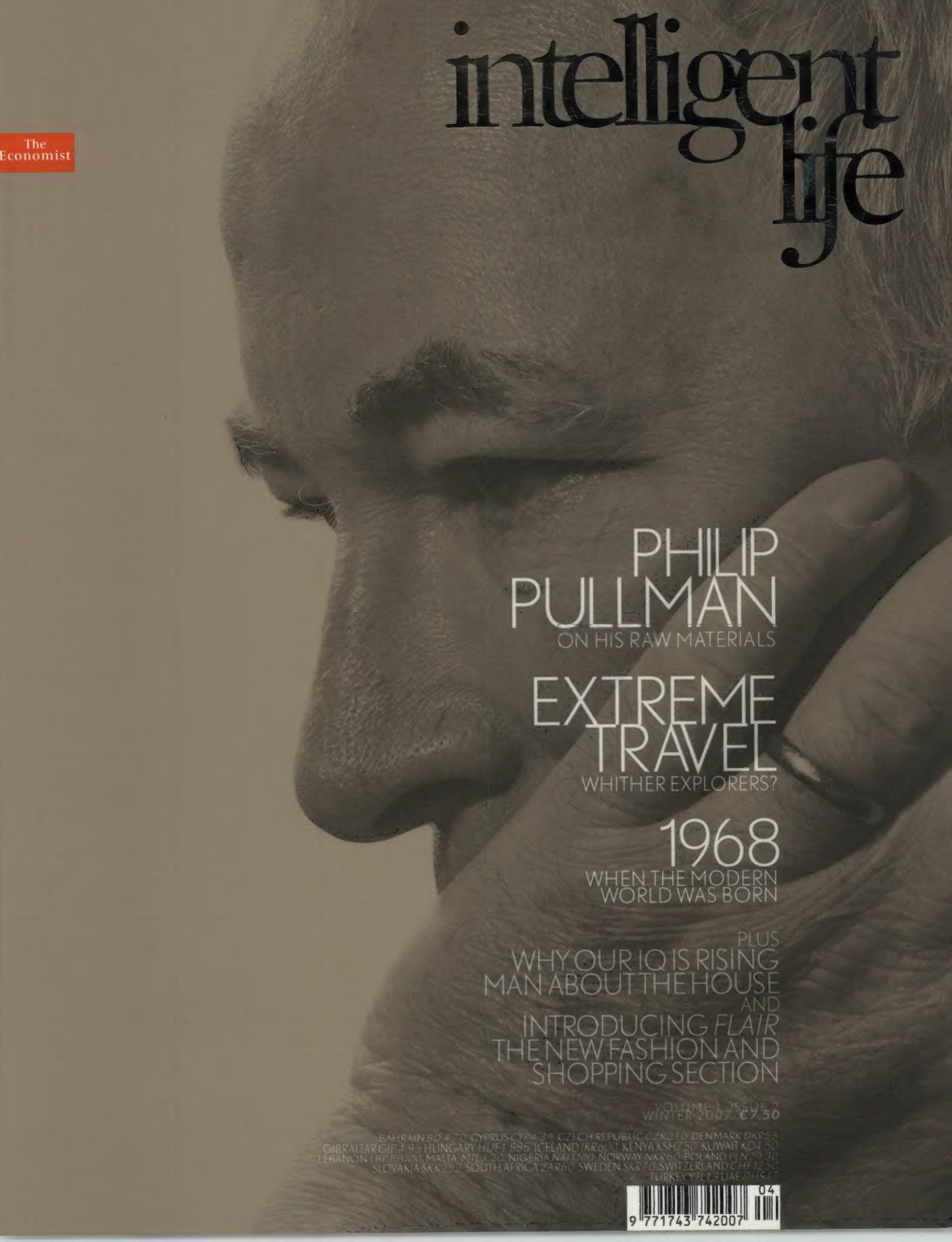

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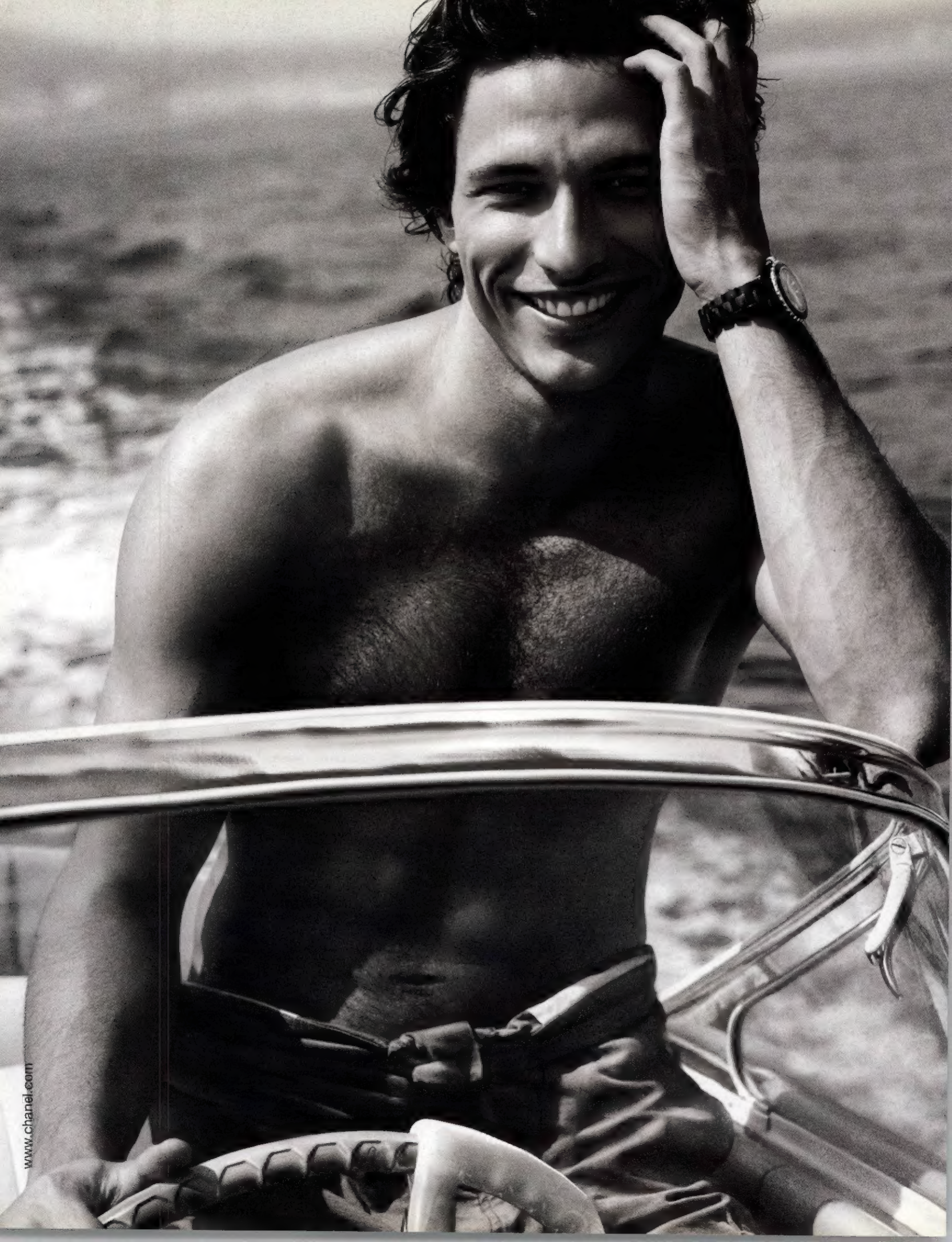
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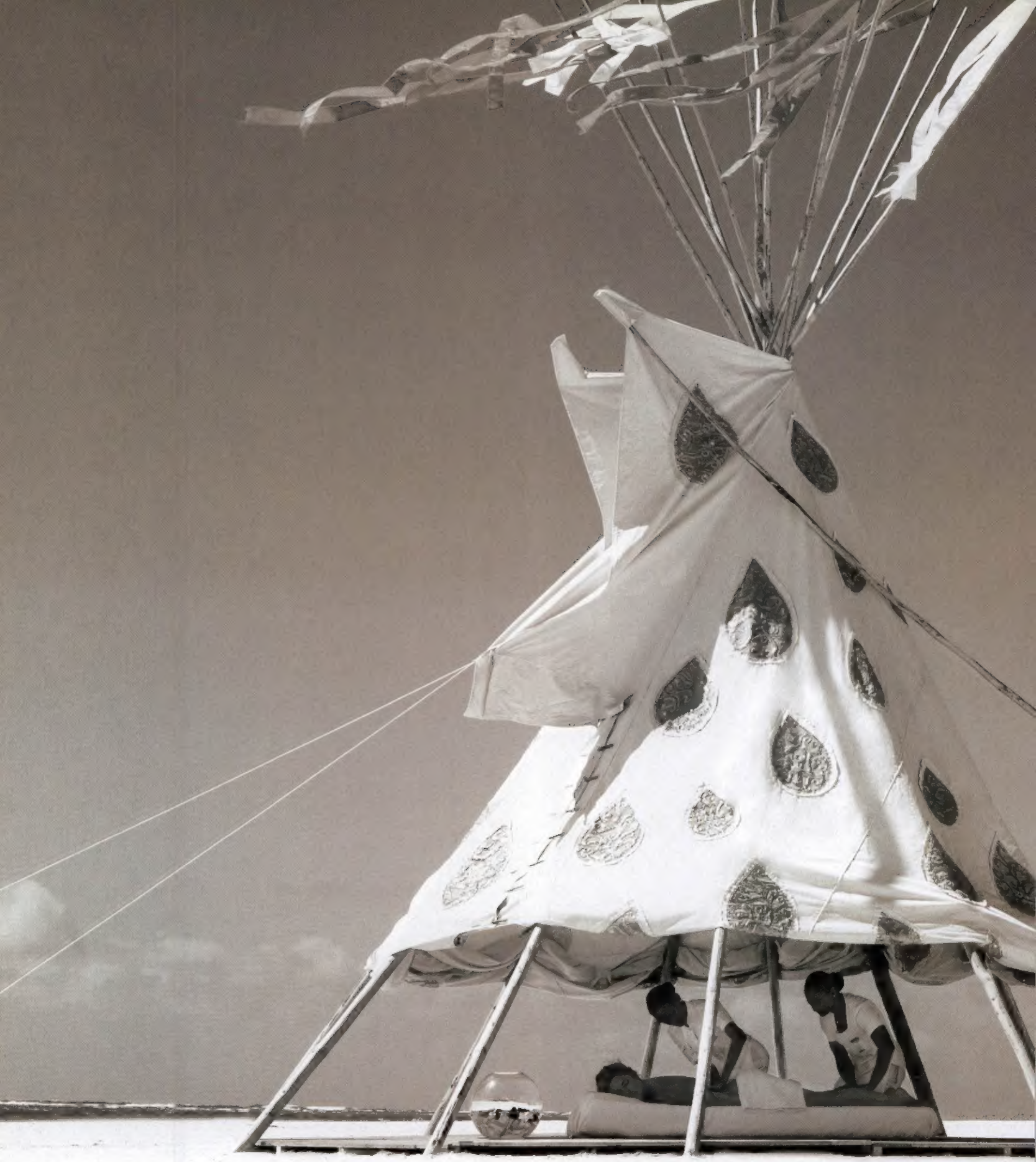

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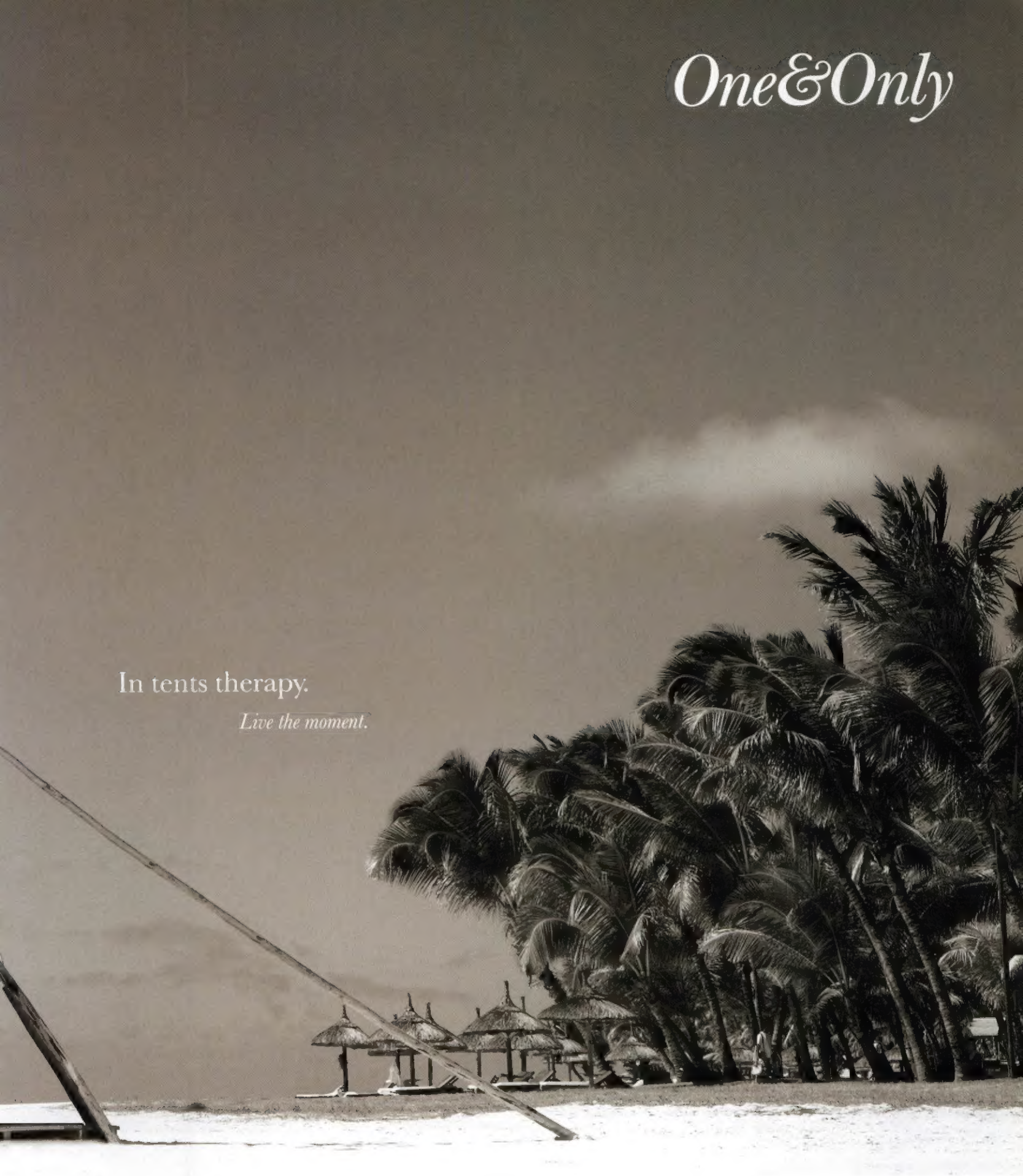

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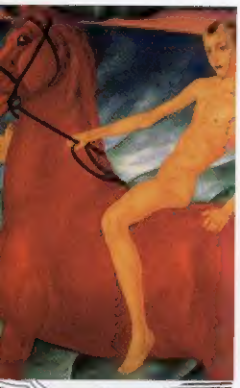

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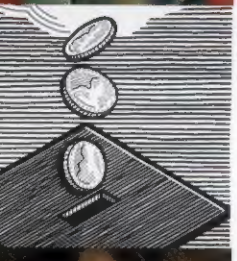

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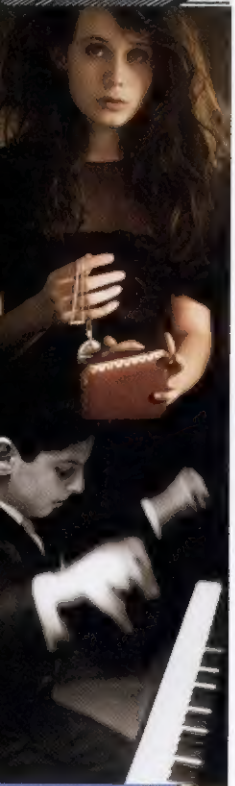

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NEWS GIVES THE ECONOMIST most of its pictures, but every so often we need to set up a photo shoot. I remember a cover story on the failings of the legal system that called for a long-serving correspondent to don wig and robe and appear as Justice Shallow. For a cover on insider trading, our present Europe editor drew on his experience as a Treasury man and dressed as a convict.

Even so, this issue of *Intelligent Life* is making a little piece of history, with the launch of Flair, our section on shopping and fashion, and—as far as I can tell—the first fashion shoot in *The Economist*'s 164 years. Don't worry. This time we didn't pick our models from among *Economist* journalists.

Writing about fashion and shopping fits right in with our aim of giving you lifestyle with substance. In a world blinded by bling, we want to look instead at the emotional qualities of things and the craft and artistry that have given rise to them. To introduce the section, we have concentrated on how beautiful jewellery takes on value and meaning as it is passed on from one generation to the next.

Elsewhere, we bring you a photo essay on an altogether grimmer form of carbon: coal—and the misery of mining it in China. We hear about story-telling from Philip Pullman, whose trilogy, "His Dark Materials", is coming to the big screen. We ask what it means to be an explorer on a planet that has been thoroughly explored; what 19th-century revolutionary thinkers have to say to modern Russia in the first Moscow production of Stoppard's trilogy, "The Coast of Utopia"; and what really changed in the tumult of 1968. We explain why our IQs are much higher than our parents'; and how fathers cope when they put their careers on hold to stay at home with the children.

If 164 years is a long time to wait for a fashion shoot, then three months, in its own way, is a long time to wait for a magazine. So I want to point you towards moreintelligentlife.com, where *Intelligent Life* goes on day by day.

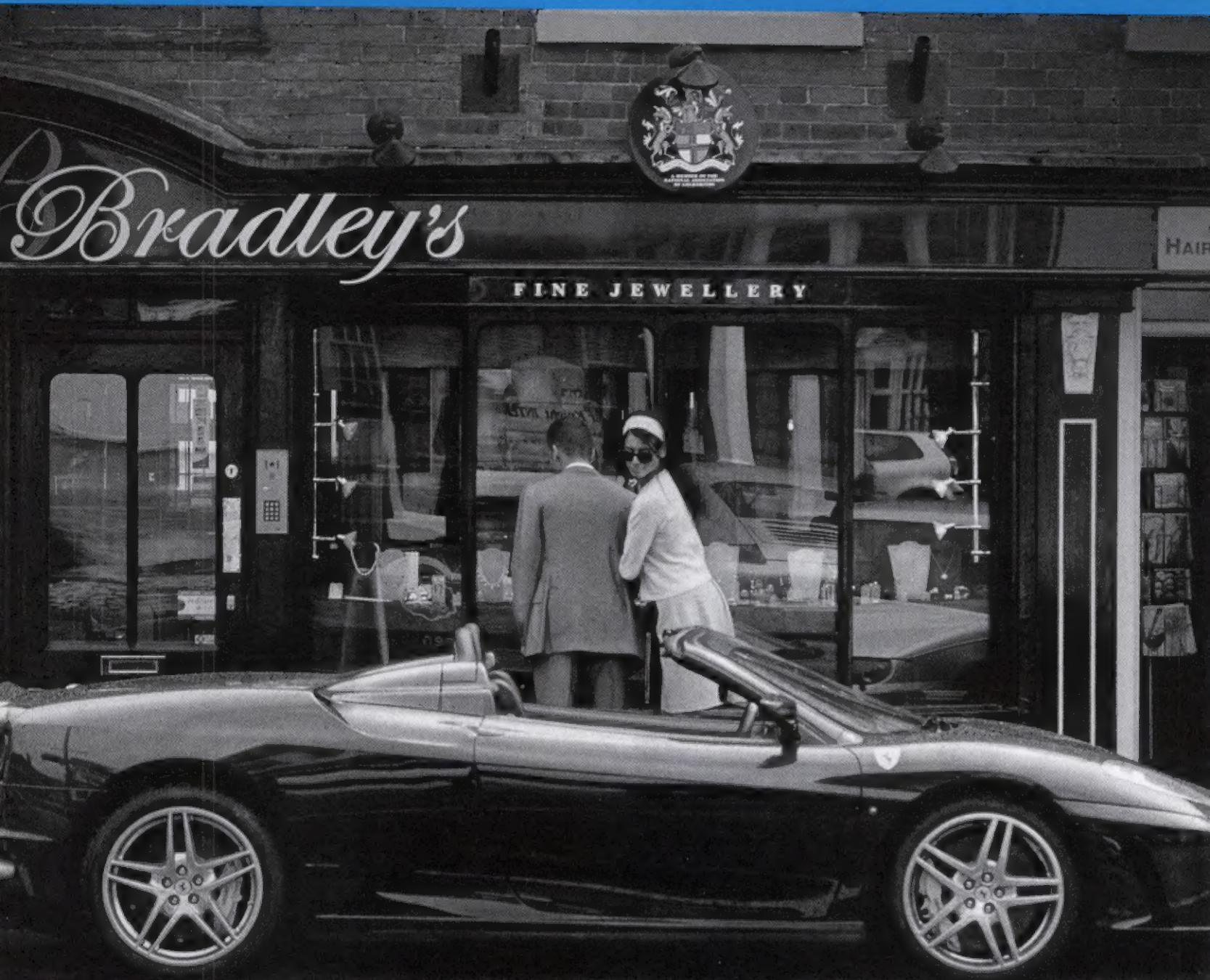
There you can find more books, more arts, more food, more wine, more travel and more ideas. It is written by guest contributors, and writers from *Intelligent Life* and *The Economist* family. In the past few weeks we have featured Anthony Gottlieb on the villains of P.G. Wodehouse, Jon Fasman on the world's most frightening food, and Bruce Palling on the sniping at Robert Parker from rivals in the wine trade.

Most of what we post is only to be found online, but the website is also our letters page and you can find articles from the magazine, starting with highlights when we appear on the news stand and building to a complete archive. Happy reading.

EDWARD CARR

PHOTOGRAPH BY FERGUS GREER

ewrcarr@economist.com



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intelligent life

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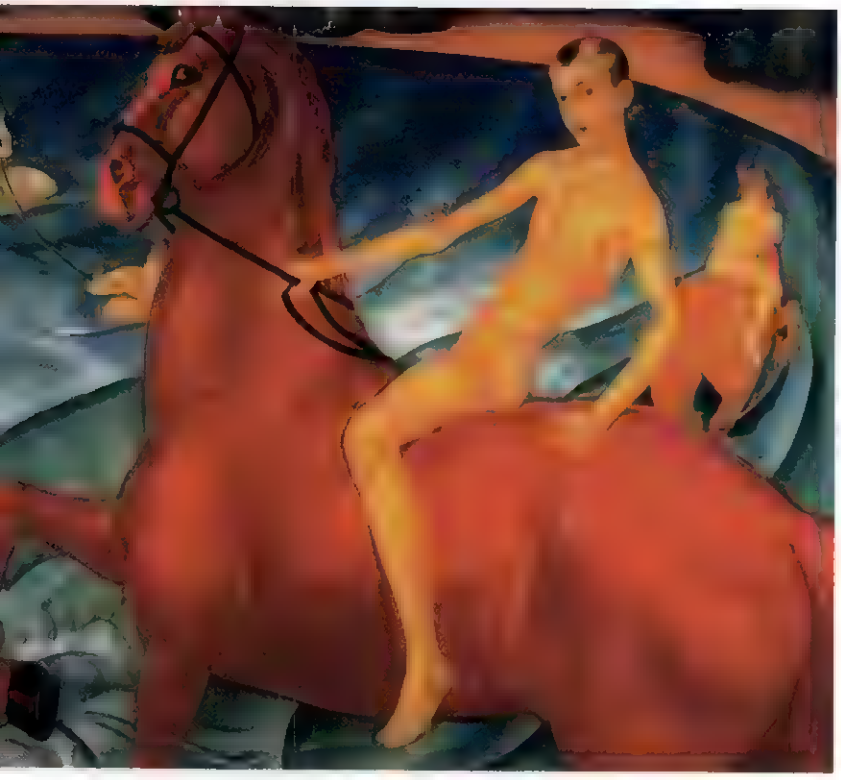
THIS SEASON

A SELECTIVE GUIDE TO THE WINTER



FROM RUSSIA WITH LIFE

A lithe, naked young man sits astride an enormous horse who seems to cast a knowing look. "The Bath of the Horse", painted by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin in 1912, is mesmerising—colourful, weird and unnervingly sexual. It comes to London for the first time in January, along with more than 120 masterpieces by Russian and French painters from Russia's leading collections. These varied paintings capture a lively, fleeting synergy between the two countries, and include Picasso's gorgeously heavy "Dryad" (1908), Ilya Repin's sentimental "Leo Tolstoy Barefoot" (1901), and Kazimir Malevich's brazen "Black Square" (c 1923) But the hordes will be queuing for the London debut of Matisse's "The Dance" (1910), which Robert Hughes once described as "one of the few wholly convincing images of physical ecstasy made in the 20th century". To gaze at this bright, iconic work—commissioned by an inspired Russian art collector whose collection was forcefully nationalised after the revolution—is to bewail the shadow cast by the decades of official Soviet art that followed. ~ EMILY BOBROW

From Russia: French and Russian Master Paintings 1870-1925
January 26th to April 18th, Royal Academy of Arts, London
www royalacademy.org uk

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ANG LEE GETS BACK

"Lust, Caution" – put those two words together and you've got the theme which runs through Ang Lee's filmography: the tug of war between the heart and the head (among other parts of the body). The two words are also the title of Lee's first new Chinese film since "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" in 1999. A two-and-a-half-hour adaptation of a 26-page short story, "Lust, Caution", which won the Golden Lion at Venice, is set in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during the second world war. As in Paul Verhoeven's "Black Book", the heroine (Tang Wei) is a resistance fighter from the occupied territory who seduces a high-ranking collaborator (Tony Leung). Neither of the lovers says much all the feelings and suspicions that crackle between them are expressed in sex scenes so explicit that they've prompted feverish press speculation about how far the actors were willing to go for their art. Whatever the naked truth of the matter, "Lust, Caution" was the first mainstream cinema release in America to be given an NC-17 certificate since "Showgirls"—another Verhoeven film. But "Lust, Caution" couldn't be further from Verhoeven's sleazy vision if it tried. Working with his usual screenwriter, James Schamus, Lee has fashioned an elegant, melancholy period drama that is measured in its pace and meticulous in its details. It's polished and precise. But cautious it ain't. ~ NICHOLAS BARBER

Lust, Caution (18) British opening January 4th

FILM AT A GLANCE In Hollywood winter is Oscar season, when the studios put aside sequels and spin-offs in favour of weighty projects that might just win a statuette or two at February's Academy Awards. A prime example is **In the Valley of Elah** (British opening January 25th), written and directed by Paul Haggis who made 2006's Best Picture winner, "Crash". Tommy Lee Jones is on career-best form as a retired soldier whose son vanishes after returning from service in Iraq. Jones also co-stars in **No Country for Old Men** (January 18th), which could have been called 'No Film for Weak Stomachs'. It's the Coen brothers' highly acclaimed, highly gruesome adaptation of a Cormac McCarthy crime novel. **Charlie Wilson's War** (January 11th) is a political drama about... well, never mind what it's about, it's the first film ever to star both Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts: two box-office titans for the price of one. **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (January 11th) won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for its unsparing depiction of a backstreet abortion in Ceausescu's Romania. And Johnny Depp stars in **Sweeney Todd** (January 25th), Tim Burton's gleefully gothic version of the all-singing, all-dancing, all-throat-cutting Sondheim musical. ~ NB

CHANKAM, HEN

THE SLIM LADY SINGS

In a profession where stage presence is calibrated in kilograms as much as decibels, the Russian soprano Anna Netrebko is a rare sylph. She's got the lot—ravishing voice, melting looks, the svelte dimensions of a pin-up, and she can act—which is why she may be the most plausible Violetta in the entire history of "La Traviata". Since triumphing as Verdi's consumptive courtesan in a little red dress at the Salzburg festival in 2005, memorialised on CD and DVD, Netrebko has made the role her signature. She pays a hotly awaited call on London in a revival of the Royal Opera House's production. ~ JASPER REES

Anna Netrebko in "La Traviata" January 14th, 17th, 20th, 23rd, 26th and 29th, Covent Garden, London. www.royalopera.org

LUCIAN FREUD LAID BARE

"I want paint to work as flesh," Lucian Freud has said. His portraits of the people in his life bear this out, with their thick impasto and textured brush strokes. But Freud, who turns 85 in December, is also an accomplished printmaker, coaxing a similar depth and heft from expert hatchings on an etching plate. MoMA has gathered 75 of these prints, together with 23 paintings and seven drawings, in a rare show of his etching technique. His frank, fraught observations, recorded with a sure hand, draw you in, demanding to be scrutinised. Witness the dour darkness of his self-portrait from 1996, or the kinetic, vibrating lines of "Large Head (State II)" from 1993. These works afford a more naked glimpse of his instincts without the cover of oil and colour Freud works to capture the aura of those he cares about, and his portraits hum with a confrontational familiarity. It is a transfixing obsession in any medium. ~ EMILY BOBROW

Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings
December 16th to March 10th, MoMA, New York
www.moma.org

MUSICAL SIMILARITIES

This winter's showdown between two rival music games, "Guitar Hero III" (left) and "Rock Band", is the video-game equivalent of a battle of the bands. Both games let players indulge their rock-star fantasies by playing along with the Rolling Stones, Iron Maiden, Metallica, Radiohead and other big names. The genre was pioneered by the original "Guitar Hero", released in 2005, which required players to press and hold combinations of coloured buttons on the neck of a guitar-shaped controller in time with the on-screen music. (No guitar-playing ability is needed—when real musicians play the game, it is often the drummers who come out on top.) "Guitar Hero III" improves on previous versions with better graphics, online play, the option of a nifty new wireless controller and a far larger number of original recordings, rather than cover versions. But it faces a challenge from "Rock Band", a new game from the creators of "Guitar Hero" who split from their original publisher—musical differences, no doubt—and are now backed by MTV. Their new game lets other players join in with the guitarist on bass guitar, drums and vocals, though with its bundle of new controllers it costs twice as much as its rival. "Guitar Hero III" was launched in November, and "Rock Band" will be available in Europe in early 2008. See you on the road, man. ~ TOM STANDAGE

RATED NO. 1 VODKA

In 2006, the Luxury Institute surveyed 1,200 luxury vodka consumers*, asking them to rate the top eight premium vodkas. They judged the vodkas on quality, uniqueness, status and their willingness to recommend to others. Of all the vodkas considered, Grey Goose emerged as the clear winner.

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* The Luxury Institute is the independent [illegible] consumer. The respondents were based in the [illegible]

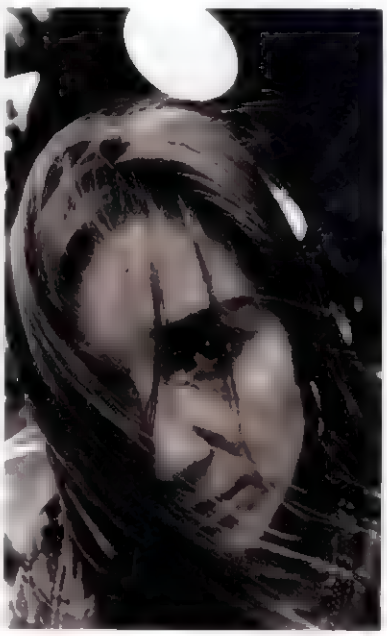
TEN RINKS WITH A VIEW

Grand architecture, frozen water, cold air on rosy cheeks, and muffled, gliding figures—since London's Somerset House first laced up its boots in 2000, temporary outdoor ice rinks in landmark locations have become a staple of Europe's winter season. In Britain, you can slide about in front of royal seats (Hampton Court, Sandringham), greenhouses (Kew Gardens), cathedrals (Winchester) and dinosaurs (the Natural History Museum). In Paris skaters spin across a rink backed by the curlicues and columns of the Hôtel de Ville (left); in Berlin, they're watched over by the stern classical façades of Bebelplatz, and Zurich has an *Eisbahn* by a modernist lakeside casino. But the most wintry is also the most recent: Moscow, which has swapped Lenin for triple lutzes and flying spins and installed a rink in Red Square. By night, its lights twinkle equally off the ice and the frost-rimed domes of the Kremlin. Happy slipping. ~ ISABEL LLOYD

PORTISHEAD RETURN AT LAST

Portishead do things at their own pace. Their spine-tingling, cinematic torch songs had some of the slowest tempos of any hits of the 1990s, and the band's work rate is even slower. As influential as their Bristolian trip-hop may be, they've released just two studio albums, in 1994 and 1997. Now, though, a third is on its way. Portishead are curating the All Tomorrow's Parties festival, where they're playing new material live for the first time in a decade, alongside Aphex Twin, Julian Cope, Sparklehorse et many al. And in October they announced on their website that a new record was finally complete. "This album has been like watching 'Lost'," they blogged, "a never-ending journey with very few answers." But even "Lost" has to reach a climax some time... ~ NICHOLAS BARBER

ATP, Butlins, Minehead, December 7th-9th. www.atpfestival.com



ROCK AT A GLANCE Big hair, vast riffs and creaking limbs the hottest ticket in years is the **Led Zeppelin** reunion at a tribute concert to the late label boss Ahmet Ertegun (December 10th, London O2). The promoters claim to have had 2m applications for 20,000 seats. The **Spice Girls** (world tour from December 2nd, Vancouver) promise an orgy of fluffier nostalgia, with 17 nights at the O2. The same joint will jump more resonantly when **Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band** wind up a European tour there (December 19th). **Madonna**'s next record, delayed from the autumn, may go back further when she hears that **Goldfrapp** have an album out ("Seventh Tree", Mute, February 25th). Alison Goldfrapp's steamy brand of disco-glam so influenced Madonna that people at her record company reportedly started calling her Oldfrapp. Now Goldfrapp are changing tack, promising "English romanticism with a hint of California sunshine". **The B-52s** come bouncing back after a 16-year lull with "Funplex" (EMI, March 3rd), "loud, sexy rock'n'roll with the beat pumped up to hot pink," apparently. Two beautiful voices ring out on **kd lang**'s "Watershed" (Nonesuch, January 28th) and **Cat Power**'s "Covers II" (Matador, January 21st). A gifted maverick resurfaces as **Robert Forster** makes his first record since the horribly sudden death of his Go-Betweens partner, Grant McLennan (Lo-Max, February or March). The tracks I heard on a visit to Forster's south London studio in October glowed with wit and wistfulness. ~ TIM DE LISLE

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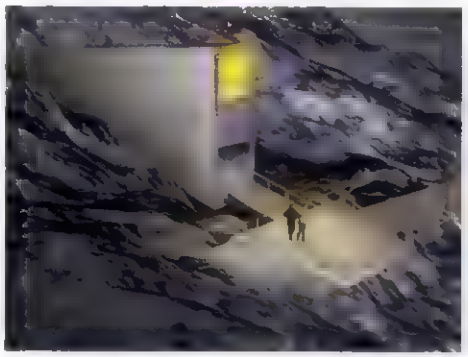
OLD AGE NAILED

For 50 years Diana Athill was a book editor at André Deutsch, the publishing house she helped found—with Deutsch, briefly her lover—just after the second world war. She discovered V.S. Naipaul, edited Roth and Updike, and patiently coaxed "Wide Sargasso Sea" from Jean Rhys. A writer who began diffidently, in her 40s, she had an unexpected hit with "Stet", the story of her life in publishing, at 85. Her sentences are shaped by lifelong, rigorous acquaintance with the best: spare, clear, wryly funny, arriving at individual beauty through a total commitment to seeing things as they are, rather than some romantic sense of how they ought to be. Which makes her the perfect person to broach the generally taboo subject of ageing. In "Somewhere Towards the End" she undertakes to describe exactly what it's like being 90 and facing imminent extinction. She contemplates the end of sex, though not yet of love (a serial Other Woman and unapologetic about it, Athill also spent two years in a happy ménage à trois). Then there's the absence of God, the indignities of illness, the burdens of care, giving up driving, how to dress a sagging body, losing family and friends—and the odd unexpected mercy. ~ AIDA EDEMARIAM

Somewhere Towards the End Granta, January

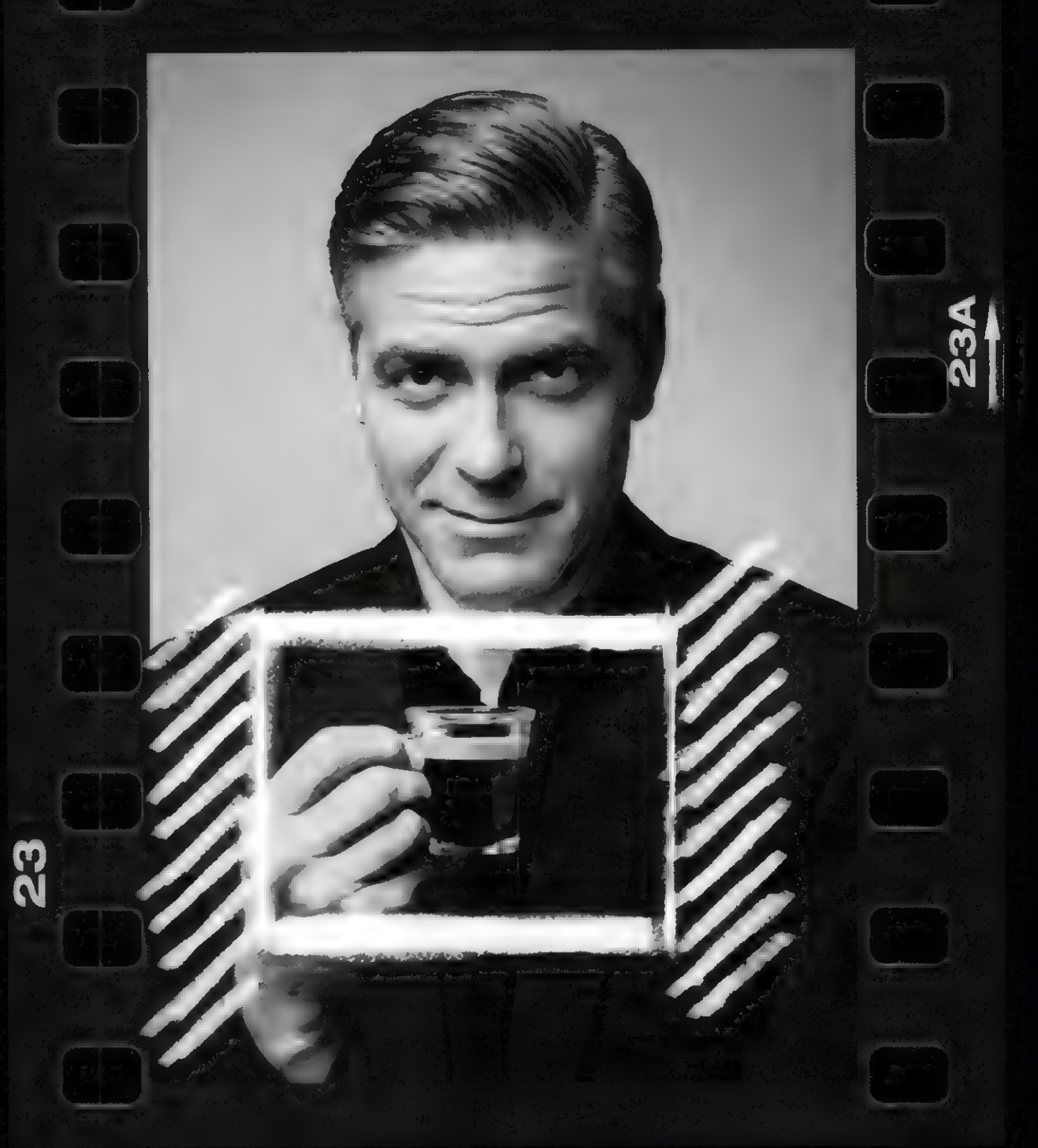
NON-FICTION AT A GLANCE J.G. Ballard looks back on a full life, interestingly lived: "Miracles of Life" (Fourth Estate, February) begins and ends in Shanghai, where Ballard grew up and was interned in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, an experience which fed his unforgettable "Empire of the Sun". I can't wait for **James Wood**'s "How Fiction Works" (Jonathan Cape, February), the first full-length book of criticism from the toughest, most lucid critic writing today, while the overblown fulminations of **Martin Amis** against Islamic *jihad*, collected in "The Second Plane: September 11, 2001-2007" (Jonathan Cape, January) will, as usual, thrill some and alienate others. ~ AE

FICTION AT A GLANCE In "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" (Faber, February), the demotically energetic **Junot Díaz** follows a cursed Dominican family through the reign of Trujillo to Nueva York and cruel New Jersey, via Tolkien and Watchmen, while **Peter Carey**, in "His Illegal Self" (Faber, February) chases a young runaway in the other direction, from privileged New York to tropical Queensland. And **Gordon Burn** is in high-experimental form, writing the news as fiction, as it happens ("Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel", Faber, February), so the results will be as much a surprise to him as to the rest of us. ~ AE



NOAH'S ARK THE SEQUEL

When he was loading the ark, Noah followed orders and took "everything that creepeth upon the earth". But God hadn't mentioned everything that sprouteth. Even now, seeds suffer from a certain neglect. There are about 1,500 seed banks scattered across the world, but barely 25 are thought to be adequately funded and none acts as back-up for all the others. Things will change on February 26th, when the Global Crop Diversity Trust opens a new seed vault in Spitsbergen, Norway, with funds from the Norwegian government and Bill Gates, among others. It looks like something out of a Bond film: a blastproof vault, in a tunnel, cut into an Arctic mountainside. The temperature inside is about -6°C, but that's not cold enough for the trust, which is refrigerating it to -10 or -20. Housing up to 4.5m samples, the vault should insure us against plague, pestilence, etc. God would surely approve. ~ TIM DE LISLE



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GREEN

IT'S A TWO-PIPE PROBLEM, WATSON

Chris Rapley is a Conan Doyle fan. He is also the new head of London's Science Museum. He talks to ROBERT BUTLER about climate change

IT WAS HENRY JAMES who said that detective stories were "not so much works of art as works of science". His remark has gained new pertinence with the appointment of a Sherlock Holmes fan, Professor Chris Rapley CBE, as director of the Science Museum. Holmes's well known methods of deduction and logic, of using first-hand evidence and reasoning from what you see, of keeping a blank mind and approaching facts in a "cold and unemotional manner", may soon be helping visitors to sort out for themselves what to think about overpopulation, stem-cell research, genetic modification and climate change.

This hasn't, traditionally, been the museum's role. Founded in 1857, it has developed through bequests and acquisitions into a vast, unwieldy collection of 300,000 objects, only 7% of them on display. A month into the job, Rapley is sitting in his South Kensington office, telling me that broadly the collection celebrates "the advances in technology since the Industrial Revolution, right up to, but not quite including, today". He wants to turn that on its head. "Its image is that it looks backwards through its collection. It's a museum, it's historical, and it's for children. Where we want to go with it, the tag line is, 'the museum of the future'." He would like the museum to be sufficiently up-to-date that someone seeing, say, a climate-change sceptic on TV, might think, 'I'm confused about climate change. I'd better go to the Science Museum and see what they're presenting in order to help me make up my mind'."

Rapley says he learnt the pleasures of working things out using the evidence in front of him from Sherlock Holmes

and that this ultimately led him to his new job. He was introduced to the stories by his English teacher at King Edward's, Bath, when he was ten or 11, in about 1957. "Once I got into it, I just burned my way through the lot of them." His father and his grandfather had been engineers. "And engineers tend to take things to bits and often not be able to put them together again. They are always curious about how things work."

It's easy to see why Conan Doyle's stories appealed to the son and grandson of engineers. "You're offered all the pieces of the jigsaw, but it's Sherlock Holmes who puts it all together. What I found thrilling was that wow moment when it all came clear and, looking back, all the evidence was there." Rapley did a degree in physics and a PhD in X-ray astronomy. "The more I got into physics and chemistry, particularly physics and maths, those wow moments emerged, because you suddenly realise you've calculated something."

The idea that "here are the pieces, now work it out for yourself" underlies his approach to the Science Museum. Rapley, like Holmes, thinks most things are elementary. "I do not believe there is a single piece of science that anyone does that could not be explained to Granny in very simple terms, because the principles are always pretty straightforward." The problem is that scientists are not very practised at "stripping away the arcane stuff and just explaining what it's all about". For Rapley, "it's all to do with telling stories".

For the first half of his career, Rapley had been a space astronomer, working as principal investigator on both NASA and European Space Agency satellite missions. (Don't tell him something isn't rocket science, because he knows exactly what is and what isn't.) But halfway through his career, he changed and became an "Earth observer". Astronomy felt a bit "indulgent", Earth-observation looked as if it might be more useful. "At the time there were a few really insightful luminaries, who were saying, 'You know, I reckon humans are going to change the way the planet works and that could be a bad thing'." (James Lovelock was an influence.) Rapley's work on Earth systems led to a job as head of the British Antarctic Survey. "So many roads lead to the polar regions, if you really want to understand how the planet works."

"There is nothing like first-hand evidence," wrote Conan Doyle in "A Study in Scarlet". It would be hard to view first-hand evidence in a cooler light than the Antarctic. "I am in a position", says Rapley, "to have seen the evidence that climate change is real, it is driven by humans, and it's serious enough that we need to do something about it."

The museum won't, however, be turning against its own fossil-fuel exhibits, or even some of its sponsors. "People sometimes expect me to be very anti-oil-company or anti-coal-company," Rapley says. "They couldn't be more wrong. I know I couldn't survive for more than a week without the constant flow of hydrocarbons upon which everything depends: my food supply; my energy supply; my transport sup- >

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> ply. So I'm really glad they're out there. It's just a big shock and a pity for all of us that this wonderful energy supply, which has completely transformed the human condition, has a big downside, and we're just beginning to recognise that we had better do something about it."

One of the 300,000 exhibits is a racing car. The other day someone suggested to Rapley that Formula One be banned. "It's daft. It's not what you should be doing. If the future of the world that you offer people in a decarbonised society is hair-shirt, miserable, and you can't do anything fun, then nobody's going to buy into it." On the other hand, he doesn't believe in carte blanche for gas-guzzlers: he has described Jeremy Clarkson, the gung-ho "Top Gear" presenter, as "reckless".

He says he would never be able to point to one single piece of evidence that proves climate change. "The point of climate change is that no individual result from a particular point on the surface of the planet really counts. It's the aggregate picture that's built up." He stresses that the Earth's systems are so complex that some of the evidence is counter-intuitive. "If you look at all the world's glaciers, 80% of them, nearly 90% of them, are retreating. But 10% of them are advancing. Well, that's overwhelming evidence that they're going in a particular direction."

When it comes to what can be done, Rapley sees great uncertainty. "That's work in progress and the museum will offer as wide a range of information as possible and encourage visitors to draw their own conclusions." But the museum will take "a strong position" on the central issue itself.

"Sherlock Holmes used to have this adage that however unlikely and uncomfortable your conclusion may be, if all other possibilities had been ruled out, you were probably right. Nobody would be happier than me if tomorrow, or later today, it turned out that for some reason we had got it all completely wrong and actually we can carry on using fossil fuels and there's no problem and everything's great. It just isn't going to happen. Because all the evidence is that that is not true. And Sherlock Holmes would have concluded that quite quickly." ■

PHOTO BOOKS

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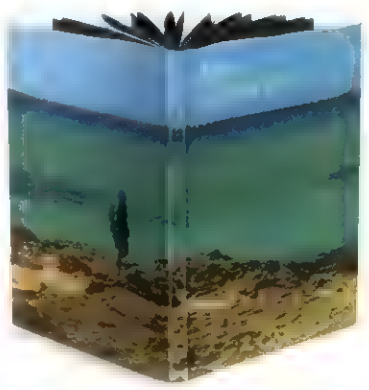
For some amateur photographers, a book is still a little too quiet. Not content with producing "Big Brother" and Facebook, 21st-century exhibitionism is encouraging our snaps to take over the house. At sites like bagsoflove.co.uk, mugs and T-shirts have been joined by wash-bags, cushions, blankets, room dividers (£675), and wallpaper (£89 per square metre). You can even project your child on to a roller blind, neatly illustrating how privacy has given way to self-promotion. ~ TIM DE LISLE

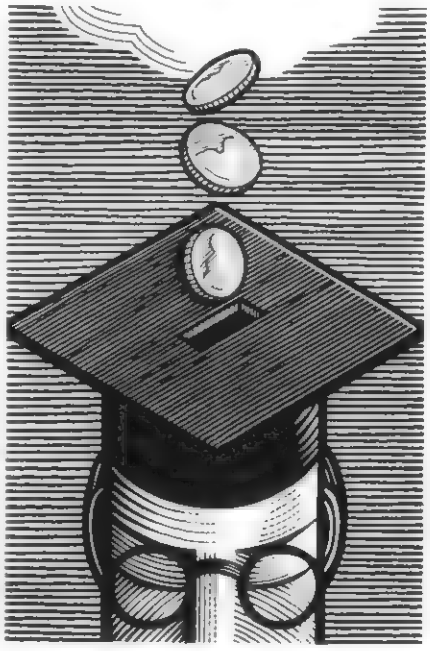


DONS & DONATIONS

Your old university wants your money and it knows how to get it, says MATTHEW BISHOP

"DON'T WORRY, I'M not going to ask you for money." The fund-raiser from Oxford University's New York office sought to reassure me. She had just been hired from a similar job at a prominent American university, and wanted to understand how the British feel about giving—although, clearly, she had already worked out that there is no quicker way to get a Brit to hang up the phone than to ask for cash. Yet, increasingly, cash is what British universities want from their graduates. Cambridge is in the middle of a campaign to raise £1 billion, roughly €1.4 billion. Oxford is about to launch itself on a similar endeavour. And Aberdeen University, for example, is asking its alumni for more backing under its vice-chancellor, Duncan Rice, who cut his teeth fundraising at New York University.

As British universities fight to remain world class on ever-less-adequate government funds, they dream of creating a culture like the one in America. The British government is cheering them on, offering taxpayers' funds to match up to £200m raised from graduates in the next three years. Even Oxford and Cambridge, with their billion-pound ambitions, are small beer compared with the endowments of Harvard and Yale, valued at $35 billion and $22 billion respectively. But they are staffing up rapidly—even if they have some way to go before matching the 400 or so people that Harvard is believed to have working on "alumni relations and capital development".



Tony Knerr, an American fund-raising consultant, says that the Cambridge campaign, which he advised, is on course to hit its target faster than expected, not least because it overcame the British reluctance to ask for money. "There's been this famous line that British alumni aren't interested in giving to their universities. It turned out to be a myth. No one had ever got it organised." Part of the strategy was to remind graduates that the university was originally a product of philanthropy, and that its reliance on the government is relatively recent. Fund-raisers also point out that Cambridge is no longer wealthy compared with its peers in America, and "appeal to national pride: keep Cambridge in the global top ten."

Already, the share of alumni—"Old Members"—giving to Oxford has crept up to 10%, but the goal is to reach 25% within five years, says Jon Dellandrea, the pro-vice-chancellor in charge of fund-raising. "I do not understand why it is a preposterous idea to expect every Old Member to write a cheque to this university every year," he says.

The jury is still out on whether they will, says Katrina Hancock, a fund-raiser for Exeter College, Oxford. She is particularly pessimistic about alumni now aged between 35 and 55, who "had government grants and grew up in a nanny-state culture. They may never be big givers." On the other hand, she says, "by the time they are 50, all our graduates now under 30 will give."

This is partly thanks to a generational change in feelings about giving, and partly to a strategy of teaching students to give. "We are asking leavers to give just before they go, and 50% do," says Hancock. The ask starts small, at only £5, but three years later the college follows up with a request for £10—which prepares graduates for bigger requests when they have more money. Unlike previous generations, today's "students aren't put off by this, because they know it is coming," says Hancock. >

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> Reunions count for a lot in America. Graduates of the best universities typically hear from them four or five times a month. They get news of their department and their class and invitations to gatherings and lectures. "Britain is 50 years behind America," says Hancock, though it is catching up.

Oxford colleges have a tradition of reunion "gaudy" dinners—notable largely as a chance to eat and drink too much and otherwise misbehave. In the three gaudies I have attended my old college, Jesus, has not once launched any serious assault on my money—not that I am complaining, you understand.

So it marked a big change when Oxford held its first university-wide alumni reunion weekend in September, offering graduates a wide range of lectures—which, unlike when they were undergraduates, many chose to attend.

The British universities also need to get their graduates to wage a new sort of class war. Classes at the main American universities compete to give more than each other, to have better reunions and so on, which makes the graduates, through peer pressure, part of the fund-raising. Oxford colleges arrange gaudy dinners by mixing a few people from several different years, which hardly deepens class loyalty.

At least Britons are likely to be spared college sports. American college sport attracts millions of television viewers, and brings in billions of dollars from graduates, says Knerr, because "people want to give to winners". Shame about the Boat Race. ■

PAINT YOUR WAGON

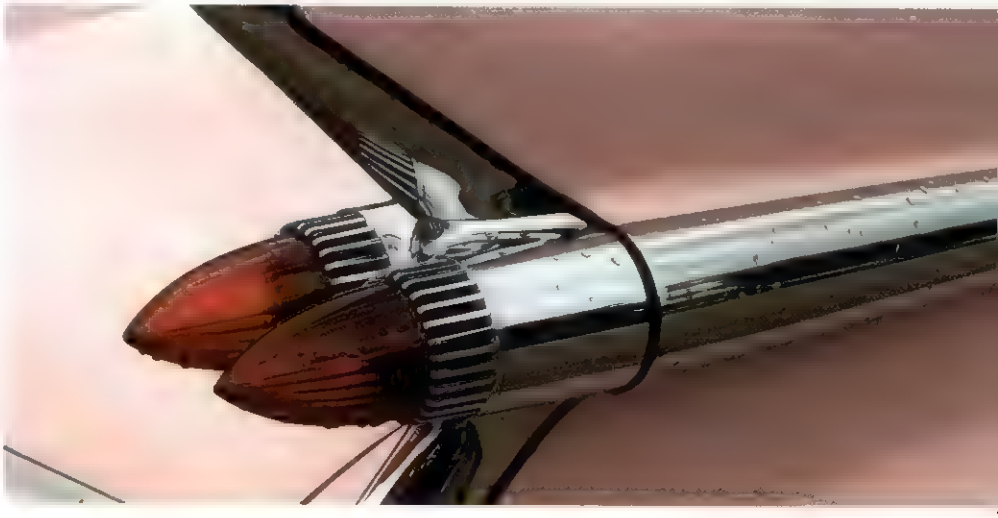
PAUL MARKILLIE thinks drivers are finally falling out of love with silver

MIKE THOMAS KNOWS that the internet is not enough. Although people go online to pick a model and book a test drive, they still visit his showroom to see what the colours look like. And most often they pick silver. But Thomas, the sales controller at Inchape Toyota in Basingstoke, a busy town west of London, thinks that is beginning to change. "People are looking at other colours," Thomas says as he surveys an ocean of shiny new cars.

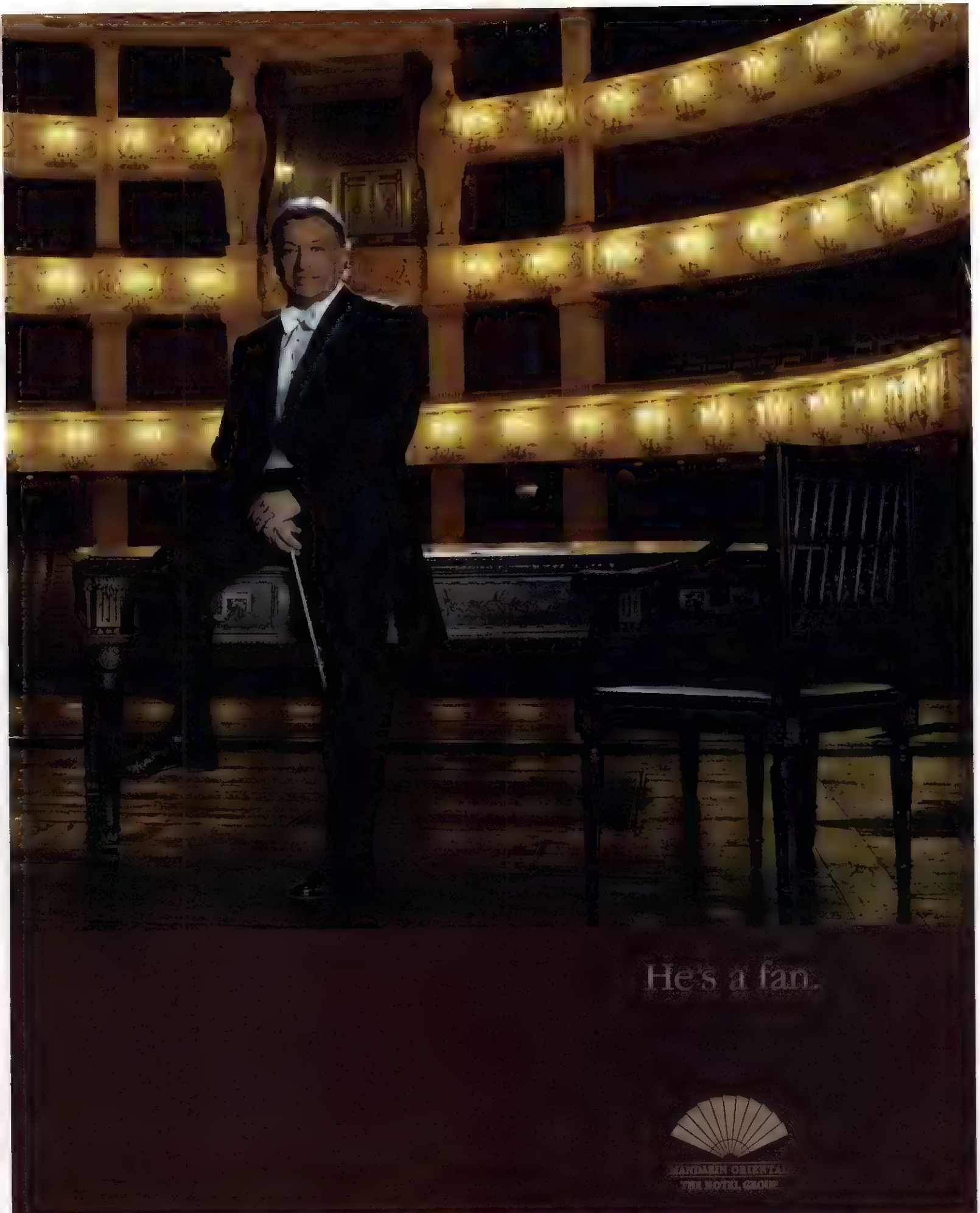
Interest is growing in vibrant blues, black and white. "White has some of the merits of silver," Thomas adds. "It is light, so it shows off the lines of a car well, and it requires less maintenance; chips in the paintwork are not so obvious and it looks cleaner for longer—not as long as silver, but better than black."

Car colours follow fashion. Light pastels were popular in the 1950s, the era of the pink Cadillac. Into the 1960s powder-blue Triumph Heralds competed with bright-red Minis and primrose Jaguar E-Types. By the 1970s browns were in vogue: many a Saab sported a nice shade of beige. But DuPont, one of the biggest suppliers of automotive paint, reckons no other colour has held the top spot for as long as silver.

Since overtaking green in 2000, silver has become the most popular colour for new cars worldwide. One-third were painted silver in 2006 and 31.5% this year, reckons PPG, an- >



THE COLOUR OF DREAMS
A 1950S PINK CADILLAC



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> other car-paint producer, which is based in Pittsburgh. Black is in second place, having jumped from 15.4% to 18%. White takes 12.5% of the market; blue 12.4%; red 8.8% and "naturals" (gold, orange and brown tones) 6.6%. Green is now a niche colour, at 3.8%.

Yet PPG thinks silver slipped for the first time in 2007, to 31.5%. And even that may overstate its popularity. Although a car may be registered as "silver", the term covers a range of increasingly sophisticated metallic-paint finishes, many of which now contain tints of red, green and other colours.

The used-car trade also thinks silver has peaked. Demand for metallic blue and black cars is proving stronger, says Jeff Paterson, chief car editor for *Glass's Guide*, which monitors valuations. Some colours can greatly reduce a car's value. Non-metallic or "base" colours can knock up to £1,000, roughly €1,400, off a two-year-old family saloon, compared with a silver or black one. The trade is particularly wary of what he calls "doom blue", a flat navy that quickly looks shabby.

Why has silver been popular for so long? Safety is sometimes given as a reason. Light colours can usually be seen more easily. But research on the link between car colours and safety is inconclusive. The biggest reason for silver's popularity is its looks.

Martin Smith, Ford's European design chief, says car designers often present their new creations to the management in silver, because it is so good at showing off a shapely car. But he has a liking for vibrant colours and chose a striking "hot magenta" for an important concept vehicle unveiled at the Frankfurt motor show last autumn. Called the Verve, it could replace the Fiesta, which Ford sells by the million.

Sometimes show colours make it into production. Ford's Focus ST has been surprisingly popular in electric orange

Ford wanted the Verve to appeal to fashion-conscious young women, so both inside and out it uses the reds and greys found in Italian fashion. Sometimes show colours, which must also photograph well, make it into production. Ford's 150mph Focus ST has been surprisingly popular in "electric orange", its colour at the 2005 Geneva car show.

Yet some colours have enduring appeal, especially those that were once international racing colours. The predominance of red Ferraris is tribute to *rosso corsa*, Italy's racing colour. (Though, despite what many people think, the drivers of red cars are not considered more aggressive and so are spared higher premiums, says the Association of British Insurers.) British racing green still looks good on Jaguars and Bentleys. Every other Mercedes Benz and BMW now seems to be painted in the colour that Germany's "Silver Arrows" once used on the track.

And new signature colours might yet emerge. Italy's Lamborghini, for instance, has taken to painting its cars in vibrant oranges and light blues. As Mr Smith says: "When you see one of these light-metallic supercars coming up in the mirror, you know it's got to be a Lamborghini." ■

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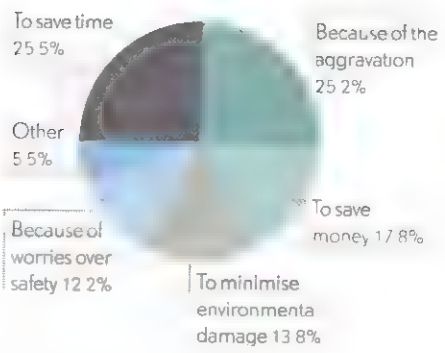
AIR SICK

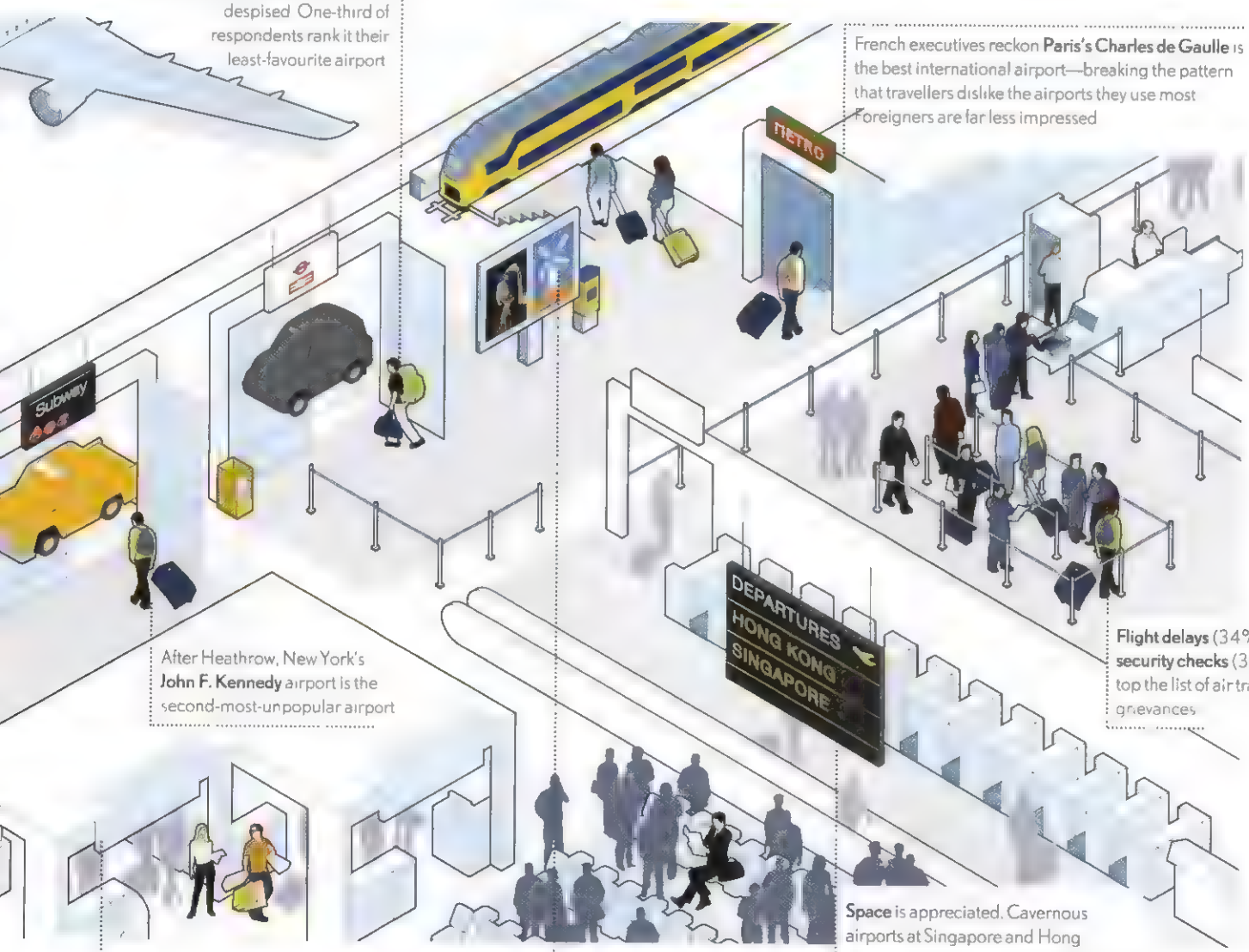
Glasses of complimentary champagne can drown only so many sorrows. More than two in five businesspeople try to avoid air travel if they can, according to a survey of more than 1,000 executives conducted for *Intelligent Life*. Saving time, not the planet, is why businesspeople try to avoid the airport

WHY DO YOU AVOID FLYING?



London's **Heathrow**, the world's busiest international airport, is also the most despised. One-third of respondents rank it their least-favourite airport

French executives reckon **Paris's Charles de Gaulle** is the best international airport—breaking the pattern that travellers dislike the airports they use most. Foreigners are far less impressed



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After Heathrow, New York's **John F. Kennedy** airport is the second-most-unpopular airport

Flight delays (34%) and **security checks** (30%) top the list of air travellers' grievances

Space is appreciated. Cavernous airports at Singapore and Hong Kong come second and third in the popularity stakes

Travellers accept that airports focus on **retailing**. With so much time to kill in terminal lounges, what else are people supposed to do?

Schiphol airport in Amsterdam tops the list of travellers' favourite airports, with 18% of the votes

What's your least-favourite airport? Let us know at www.moreintelligentlife.com

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HOT STUFF

JON FASMAN makes a cup of tea—green tea, that is. And he does it properly

EVERY EVENING AFTER dinner, for as long as I've known her, my wife has practised a simple ritual: she takes a bag of tea from the cupboard above the stove, drops it in a cup, fills a kettle with water, boils the water, pours it over the teabag and lets it steep for a few minutes. She calls this "making a cup of tea", and she seems to enjoy it.

This morning, I decided to try it for myself. First, I chose which of the 16 types of loose-leaf tea lined up on my desk in little green boxes best suited my mood. *Song yang* or *pouchong*? Keemun Concerto or Yunnan Gold? White, green, *oolong* or black? Once decided (I went for Silver Needle, a white tea that looked like fuzzy rosemary and smelled like dusty honey), I measured two teaspoons into an IngenuiTEA: a single-cup teapot for loose tea, kindly provided for a day's experimenting by Adagio, a maker of brewers' gadgetry. I set an adjustable UtiliTEA kettle to the appropriate setting for white tea, waited for the water to come to precisely 82°C, poured the water over the leaves, let them steep for exactly seven minutes, then set the IngenuiTEA atop a mug, thus releasing a valve and letting the steeped tea strain into my cup.

Had I not wanted to drink my tea immediately, I could have made it using, yes, a TriniTEA, a machine that steeps tea at the proper temperature for the proper amount of time—both variables being easy to change, depending on type and amount of leaf—and keeps it warm for hours: it is, in essence, a coffee-maker for tea.

Now, I like an absorbing ritual as much as the next mildly autistic kitchen geek, but I couldn't help finding this a little ridiculous. I had always thought of tea as "the hot drink I never particularly want", or "the hot drink that isn't coffee", and although I vaguely knew about Japanese tea ceremonies and Russian samovars, it had never occurred to me that a procedure as simple as boil, steep, drink could be made so incredibly complicated. Until, that is, I took a sip of the Silver Needle. It was extraordinary: as alive and nuanced as an aged Bordeaux, at once delicate and rich, astringent and refreshing, it was something not to gulp idly, but to savour and contemplate. For comparison's sake, I made a cup the old-fashioned way: I set a (non-adjustable) kettle on to boil, then steeped the leaves for while. The result was flat and dull.

These are boom times for tea. Over the past 16 years, tea-sales in the United States alone have grown from $1.8 billion to $6.5 billion, with the largest growth in the high-end and speciality brews. The popularity of green and white teas has soared (green tea has been lightly fermented, whereas white teas are simply picked and dried), thanks to their healthy reputation. Yet when it comes to proper brewing, green-tea consumers seem to suffer from near-universal incompetence.

When made with boiling, rather than hot, water, green tea turns bitter and soapy. Michael Cramer, Adagio's founder, tells me: "People think if tea tastes like medicine, it must be 'working'." Needless to say, properly made green tea has all the health benefits—without tasting like furniture polish.

The legend is that tea was born when some *Camilla sinensis* leaves fell into a pot in which the Chinese emperor Shen-Nung was boiling water several thousand years ago. But we have fallen to drinking shredded, poor-quality tea stuffed in porous paper sacks. It seems scientific ingenuity has returned tea to a state Shen-Nung might recognise—even if it does turn my wife's simple ritual into a kitchen ballet. ■

The UtiliTEA, TriniTEA and IngenuiTEA are available from www.adagio.com, prices from $19 (€13.50) plus shipping

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RePasts *nº1*

"Now bring us some figgy pudding..."

"We Wish You a Merry Christmas" (Traditional)

I can't remember how old I was when I realised that the singers carolling on our doorstep were demanding "figgy pudding"—and not simply "pudding" preceded by a slightly obscured obscene participle. I was even older before I realised that the dish actually existed

The medieval tradition of banging together spices and dried fruits—both status-boostingly expensive items—produced figgy pudding, which lives on principally in song. The recipe has many variants, but almost all call for a couple of pounds of dried figs, a hefty pinch each of cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, ginger and saffron, plus orange peel, brandy-soaked raisins, plus perhaps sultanas or apricots, and suet. These are mixed with as little milk and flour as it takes to form thick dough, steamed for several hours and served with "hard sauce": butter creamed with rum or brandy, then left to set atop the cake.

It was a seasonal mainstay until the end of the Victorian era, but after that fell from favour. Perhaps a tight-fisted chef realised that, with so much else in it, the figs could be forgotten without anyone noticing—creating the modern Christmas pudding. ~ JF

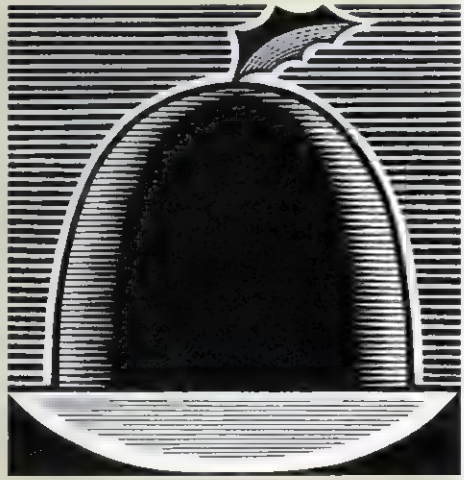

ILLUSTRATION BY CLIFFORD HARPER

NO BOUNDARIES

This is the age of the long-distance fan. LAWRENCE BOOTH reports

"THANKS FOR BEING a part of history," yelled an American voice over the tannoy on a drizzly evening in north-west London. He could have added: "and a part of the future too." The American-football game at Wembley Stadium on October 28th between the Miami Dolphins, nominally the home side, and the New York Giants should have been a gamble. It was the first regular-season National Football League (NFL) match ever staged outside the Americas, but the scramble for tickets resembled one of the game's more robust scrimmages: in the first 72 hours, there were over 500,000 applications for the 80,000 seats. And of those, 85% came from within Britain.

The idea that sports can flourish outside their traditional strongholds might sound like fantasy, but at Wembley it was obvious the figure of 85% had not been massaged by too many British-based Americans. When Martin Johnson, once England's rugby inspiration, was introduced as the honorary captain of the Dolphins, the stadium erupted. John Terry, his Giants counterpart and the captain of Chelsea, drew only boos: north-west London is closer to Arsenal and Tottenham. It was a very English kind of tribalism.

And yet the tribal allegiances switched easily to the Dolphins and the Giants when they were centre-stage. Ear-splitting cheers accompanied the players' every pre-match entrance and the fans' attention was held by the staples of the American sporting experience: live rock music, fireworks, cheerleaders and giant inflatables. It put the average British sporting day out to shame. Among the enthusiasts were Carla Ball and her husband Bob, both members of the Dolfans, the small but loyal Dolphins fan club in Britain. Like many others, Carla's fascination with American football was piqued in the 1980s by Channel 4, whose Sunday-evening highlights package provided an antidote to its competitors' religious programmes in the much-disparaged "God-slot".

A trip to Miami in 1988 assumed pilgrim-like proportions when Carla ordered a drink and was talked through the intricacies of a televised match by the barman. Since then, encouraged by the sport's greater prominence on both terrestrial and satellite TV in Britain, Carla and Bob have flown to Florida for two to four matches a year. "I think the NFL have just never known how to tap into the British market," says Carla, who is 44, works in human resources at a hotel near Heathrow and doubles up as the Dolfans' membership secretary. "We used to have >

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> pre-season games here involving NFL teams and they would always be sold out. Finally they've realised there's a huge fan base over here."

What has also changed since Carla first marvelled at the tactics of "two teams trying to outwit each other" is the feeling that distance is a barrier. If satellite television did half the job of creating long-distance fans, the internet has done the other half. In the past if you were, say, a Northampton Town football fan living in Hollywood, you would have been starved of news. The *Los Angeles Times* has many strengths, but covering distant leagues is not one of them. Now you can bookmark the club website, read the *Northampton Chronicle* online, put the club's name into your RSS news feed, follow matches minute-by-minute on the BBC site, and generally be as despairingly well informed as anyone in Northampton.

Henry Leventis, studying for a PhD in solar energy at Imperial College in London, pays $12-15 a month to tune into Major League Baseball's live internet streaming. "It offers the flexibility of being able to watch it when you want, either live or the re-run," he says. MLB TV stream every game, so that's 162 matches per team, per year. And the time difference can be a plus rather than a drag. "There are times when we get back from the pub or club, buy a kebab and sit down to watch the Red Sox."

Long-distance fans are devoted, almost by definition. If they can't see live footage, they will settle for live reporting. Since 2002, I've been one of the writers bashing out cricket coverage for Guardian Unlimited, which offers over-by-over updates on all England's matches. Every three or four minutes, we post the score and a couple of sentences about what has just happened, along with a comment or joke e-mailed in by a reader—which is just as likely to come from Hong Kong as Horsham. What started as a hunch by an editor has grown into a sporting version of Marshall McLuhan's global village.

Although some users have stumbled across cricket on the road less travelled—Mark Alfson, 42, from Ohio, says his interest was sparked as a child by obscure allusions to the game on Monty Python—it is mainly British expats who contribute to the strange but beguiling sense that someone, somewhere is always hammering the refresh key. English teachers in China, hikers in the Andes and office workers in Sydney keen for respite from Pom-bashing all contribute to this tribalism on a global scale. And they are legion: over-by-over and its football equivalent, minute-by-minute, are often among the most-read pages of the week on Britain's most visited newspaper site.

N. Manoj, an 18-year-old student in Bangalore, began supporting Chelsea in 2003-04. He likes to be called Frank

In India the phenomenon comes with a twist. N. Manoj, an 18-year-old economics student in Bangalore, is one of an estimated 42m Indians who tuned into the English Premier League on ESPN Star last season. He began supporting Chelsea during the 2003-04 season, following games on TV until 2 or 3am, with his parents' agreement—on condition that he studied harder to make up for it. He likes to be called Frank, after the Chelsea star Frank Lampard.

"I fight with a lot of guys about which is the better team, Chelsea or Man U," he says. "All Indians support the Indian cricket team, so they can't really argue among themselves about that. But with English football, there is a lot of banter. In my home town of Ernakulam in Kerala, my friends and I all wear our official Chelsea jerseys and watch games together." Whether football can supplant cricket in the locals' affections is doubtful. India (population: 1.1 billion) is ranked 145th by FIFA, only five places ahead of Luxembourg (population: not even 500,000). But Manchester United discerned enough potential to send a coaching team to Goa to search for young talent. The old jibe aimed at the club's fans—"Oh, you're a Man U fan? So which part of London do you live in?"—is already out of date. United are huge in the Far East.

Back in America the major sports are rapidly shedding their old insularity. There is even a new category of sports administrators, called expansion executives. Heidi Ueberroth, the head of the National Basketball Association's worldwide expansion programme, recently told the *Observer*: "Businesses, whether they are American, multinationals, British or Asian-based, are not talking about borders. That's the game changer here. It's a global opportunity." For sports lovers, it's already a way of life. ■

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LAZY LANGUAGE LAZY THOUGHT

When people spout empty verbiage nobody knows what they mean—including the spouters. JOHN GRIMOND calls for clarity

OPEN A NEWSPAPER and you are likely to find a pundit putting you right about language. Pedants bemoan the misuse of such words as "execution" (which means "putting into effect the verdict of a court of law", not "murdering a hostage"), "presently" ("soon", not "now") and "enormity" ("great crime", not "big thing"). They have a point. Language is impoverished when words lose their meanings.

But it can also be enriched when words gain meanings. One of the strengths of English is its readiness to allow words and phrases to gain uses. Publications no longer have to appear daily to be journals, nor salaries to be paid in salt. And "making love", which once involved only a bit of billing and cooing, now means going the whole hog, a phrase, incidentally, that derives from the inability of Islamic scholars to decide which bit of the pig was forbidden to Muslims. So said the poet William Cowper, anyway:

> But for one piece they thought it hard
> From the whole hog to be debarred.

Languages, like French and Spanish, that are supervised by a board of self-important overseers risk becoming fossilised, absurd or unable to carry out the tasks that their users demand of them. And in the age of booting up, corporate governance and waterboarding, new tasks appear all the time.

One task for language is communication. This does not need perfect English. No one is really misled by a sign that says, "This door is alarmed" or "Disabled toilet", still less by "I ain't done nothing." The task that suffers most from mangled language is thought, when people communicate with themselves. If they cannot express themselves to themselves, they have no chance of expressing themselves to other people.

Anyone trying to impress, to sell or to obfuscate is likely to brutalise the language. Prominent offenders are businessmen, with their on-board customer-service representatives, non-incremental growth opportunities and enhanced information-management activities, providing innovative solutions and significant leverage in the use of resources, and thus permitting an increasing percentage of senior professional time to be expended on value-added solutions.

Politicians can effortlessly match this. Their stock-in-trade is sustainable development, key performance indicators, the knowledge-based economy (any takers for the ignorance-based alternative?), inclusiveness and empowered communities, all offered up with mandatory passion, vision and excitement. Put politicians together with soldiers and you get Islamofascism, extraordinary rendition, self-injurious behaviour incidents and the war on terror.

'Twas ever thus. Orwell pointed out in 1946 that, since political language is usually the defence of the indefensible, it has to consist "largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness". And long before him Tacitus remarked, "They make a desert and call it peace."

That euphemism, word-twisting and empty phrase-making have been around for ever does not make them any less pernicious. In an age of mass communication, they are quickly absorbed by lazy thinkers who believe they are saying something important when they declare, "It is this combination of hard-edged critical thinking and innovation with commitment and perseverance that will be the hardest challenge."

It is but a short step to explaining, as a British politician did recently, that "If I did use the word meaningful, I didn't mean it to mean anything at all." Confused? Don't be: it was an honest admission. Such talk is mere noise created by people who have nothing to say but think they must say something.

Yet it has consequences. Once it took a face to launch a thousand ships; now a slam dunk is enough to send America to war. "Our business is to see what we can do with the English language as it is," wrote Virginia Woolf. "How can we combine the old words in new orders so that they survive, so that they create beauty, so that they tell the truth?" ■

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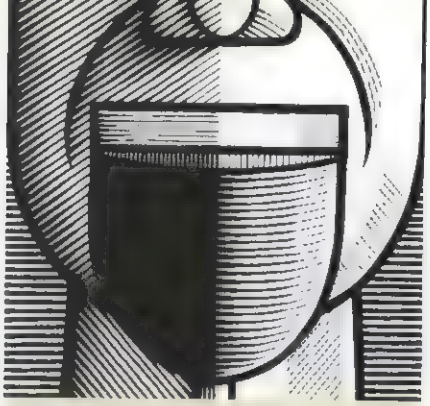

CHEZ SOI N'EST CE PAS?

Our wine-list inspector, TIM ATKIN, calls on Brussels' grandest restaurant

IF YOU WANT to impress your friends in Brussels, tell them you're going to Comme Chez Soi. Like the Atomium or the Mannekin Pis, Comme Chez Soi is a Brussels landmark. The Bruxellois talk about it as a pricey, once-in-a-lifetime experience, but no one dares criticise the place. To do so would show a lack of respect: like burping mid-meal, or turning up in a shell suit.

There's no denying the excellence of the cuisine, cooked by the father and son-in-law team of Pierre Wynants and Lionel Rigolet, or the quality of the service, marshalled (and that's definitely the word) by the two chefs' wives, Marie-Thérèse Wynants and Laurence Rigolet. But what about the wine list? The restaurant's website calls it "undisputedly one of the best in Europe", but I am less inclined to hyperbole.

Comme Chez Soi's selection is aimed at the well-heeled diner. There's a whiff of old Belgian money about the place, supplemented by the spending power of European Union potentates and assorted business executives. Such people are often suckers for a list crammed with famous names from Burgundy and Bordeaux, and less likely to notice that they are being politely, but firmly fleeced.

There are 1,200 bins maturing in the restaurant's cellars, 700 of which sell for more than €150 a bottle. Even when you bear in mind that 16% service is included, it's hard to leave Comme Chez Soi without a hefty wine bill. Tellingly, only five wines are priced below €50, and they are pretty ordinary. A wine like the zesty, refreshing 2005 Lurton Les Salices Sauvignon Blanc, Vin de Pays d'Oc should sell at €25 rather than €42. On the plus side, there is a good selection of half bottles.

You can't fault the eclecticism of the list. As well as the classic French sources, there are wines from the Jura, the Languedoc-Roussillon, Savoie, Jurançon and Provence. The knowledgeable head sommelier, William Wouters, told me that the list has become considerably more diverse in recent years. It's good to see a top restaurant offering small and generally well chosen selections from Portugal, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Chile, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina,

COMME CHEZ SOI

23 Place Rouppe
B-1000 Brussels
Tel +32 (0) 2 512 2921

www.commechezsoi.be

Full wine list not available outside the restaurant

Lunch 12pm-3pm
Dinner 7pm to 11pm
Closed Sunday, Monday and Wednesday lunch

IN THE BIN

Head sommelier: William Wouters (since 1987)

Number of wines: 1,200 (including 92 half bottles, 116 magnums and six double magnums)

Number of wines by the glass: 14 (including two Champagnes)

Number of wines under €50 (excluding half bottles): 5

Number of wines over €150: 700

Best-value wine: 2005 Terras Gauda, Albariño, Rías Baixas (€67)

Worst-value wine: 1996 Château Montelena Chardonnay (€150)

Gluggability: * ◆ [illegible]

Sparkling water: €10

Expense-account adjuster*: ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

The Sancerre index**: 4.12

* Probability that the next-door table are paying with the company's money
** 2005 Sancerre Domaine de la Garenne €66 at Comme Chez Soi. Retail price around €16

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not to mention Luxembourg and, er, Belgium. The wines by the glass are similarly diverse.

But the focus here is on Burgundy and Bordeaux, with an impressive array of vintages and producers. There are comparative bargains (1989 Château Pétrus at €2,350, for example), but too many are rip-offs, even by British standards. To take three examples: 1988 Château Latour (€875) sells for £285 at Chez Bruce, 1995 DRC Richebourg Grand Cru (€2,500) is on the list at the Fat Duck at £1,400 and 1989 Château Lafite (€1,650) costs £550 at the Square. Given that many of these wines were bought as futures, Comme Chez Soi should be passing on the saving.

There are other irritations: no tasting notes, boring by-the-glass Champagnes, no separate sweet-wine section, a sprinkling of spelling mistakes (Côteaux, Ribeira del Duero, Insolia, Alvarinho), past-it vintages of certain wines (2000 Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais Villages and 1995 Roxburgh Chardonnay, for instance) and a selection of rosés in which the youngest is a 2004. To merit its place alongside the great wine-focused restaurants, Comme Chez Soi needs to make improvements—despite what they might tell you in Brussels. ■

Tim Atkin is a Master of Wine

The best of Brussels

EIGHT WORTHY WINES

2003 Pintia, Toro (€94) *Vega Sicilia is one of Ribera del Duero's most celebrated reds. Less well known is that the same team makes another excellent wine from Tempranillo grapes in less fashionable Toro.*

1999 Domaine de la Bongran, Mâcon-Villages (€99) If you like white Burgundies with masses of flavour, a touch of sweetness and (invariably) some botrytis characters, try Jean Thévenet's off-the-wall Chardonnay. It's controversial, so be sure to pair it with the right dish.

2001 Planeta Merlot, Sicily (€101) *Diego Planeta was the man who introduced French grape varieties to Sicily, transforming the region's bulk image. This supple, well crafted Merlot is a much better buy than many of the over-priced clarets on the list.*

2005 Guru, Wine & Soul, Douro (€115) You might be more accustomed to drinking the red wines of the Douro Valley (both fortified and unfortified), but this understated new-wave dry white made from local Portuguese varieties is one of the best on the Iberian Peninsula.

2000 Alsace Riesling, Cuvée Frédéric Emile, Trimbach (€117) *In the world of Riesling, the focus these days tends to be on Australia, Austria and Germany. So much so, that Alsace is often overlooked. This dry, minerally intense white is the region's finest expression of a multi-faceted grape.*

1996 Henriot Brut Champagne (€150) Henriot is not seen as one of Champagne's stars, but it should be going by this form. This toasty, generously flavoured, bone-dry fizz from an excellent vintage is good now, but will improve for another five years or more.

1996 Volnay Santenots du Milieu, Domaine des Comtes Lafon (€163) *A comparative bargain among the red Burgundies at Comme Chez Soi, this shows what a great producer can do with Pinot Noir in an exceptional year. The wine has plenty of fruit, but also has the structure to back it up.*

2002 Domaine de la Grange des Pères, Vin de Pays de l'Hérault (€175) This was not the greatest vintage in the Languedoc, but in the hands of a leading winemaker like Laurent Vaillé, you would never know it. He has created a silky, almost red, Burgundy-like blend of Syrah, Mourvèdre and Cabernet that is stunning.

DOUBLE OH-YOU

MI6's authorised biographer, ALAN JUDD, on how to be a secret agent

WHAT MAKES A spy? A penchant for subterfuge, a taste for the underhand? A talent for evasion, a suspicious eye, a disregard for truth? "Licensed to kill with gun, knife or bare hand"? None of the above. Although it's possible to imagine circumstances where any of these skills could be useful, they're all more likely to hinder than help. Taken together, they could prove a lethal cocktail. The point is, you can be a spy. So could I. So could any of the ordinary people around us.

Look around your office. Every day at work, people gossip. Who's in? Who's out? Who's getting the best perks? It's a daily confirmation that knowledge is power, which easily translates into espionage. Trivial, but espionage all the same. All it would take for most of us to become "real" spies would be a change of context (a sense of injustice, or an outbreak of war), access to desirable information—and courage.

A taste for deceit and the thrill of betrayal can help, of course. Cicero, code-name of possibly the best German agent of the second world war, was a natural deceiver, a Shakespearean villain who gloated over his triumph. He was the apparently discreet, loyal and efficient butler to the British ambassador to Turkey. He was certainly efficient at tidying up top-secret documents the ambassador (despite repeated warnings) left lying around, then selling them to the Nazis. His confessed motives were resentment and a desire to get one over on his clever, haughty employers (though money and repressed lust for the ambassador's wife also played a part). He was unmasked because his German case officer began to spy for the Allies—the one great danger no spy can do much about.

But Cicero wasn't typical. If you are an honest person, you will make a better spy. Honest people are more conscientious, less selfish, and less likely to fall under suspicion. You are also less likely to want to be James Bond.

This is very important, because Bond is no spy. In life, Bond would be staff: an intelligence officer, whereas those he recruited would be the spies. Spies seek intelligence—secret information secretly acquired—but Bond does little or none of that. He kills people, averts mass destruction, avenges or saves goodies, punishes baddies. Spies prefer talking to killing. They know things—nuclear secrets, terrorist identities, hostile intent—and their mission is to pass their knowledge to someone who wants it. You may become a spy for any reason, good and ill, but you won't deal in corpses: dead men tell no tales.

So imagine you are an intelligence officer sent to St Moritz to recruit a spy—say, a nuclear scientist on a skiing trip. (For this, as most jobs, Bond would be undeployable: too famous for anything secret.) You will have to use an alias, possibly a disguise—both fraught with complications, danger and comic potential. You'll need a mundane and checkable reason for being there, and to hire an unremarkable car in case your quarry travels. You'll need changes of clothes, and a pocketful of ski-passes and bus tickets. (In fact, you'd need back-up, but let's grant you luck and athleticism.) You will not be armed; guns are more likely to get you into trouble than out of it.

You'll have to decide which sort of "vacuum cleaners", say, to pretend to be selling. And once you've met your quarry, you'll need a line—money, ideology, patriotism? Flattery, grievance, blackmail? A shared passion for particle physics? You will then have to contrive time alone with him. But how? An encounter on a remote ski slope, a broken leg off-piste that gives you time for a quick word before the air ambulance comes? A ski-lift for two that gets stuck? Your own faked injury? It's easy to see why espionage is sometimes more Peter Sellers than Sean Connery.

Perhaps it is easier being the spy, after all. All you need then is something someone else wants to know, to have a reason to give away that knowledge—and to make contact with someone.

And then you need to pray, every night as you go to bed, that your handler is not working for the other side. ■

Next issue: Are you being tailed?

ILLUSTRATION BY MICK MARSTON

OAKLEY SI ASSAULT BOOT

HEELS Intuition says that keeping your ankle supported is the best way to stop its bones breaking in a parachute jump. In the original design for this shoe, for American Special Forces, Oakley found that the sole's heel is at least as critical: it's relatively wide, and when walking or landing from above, the foot's tendency to roll from heel to toe is guided by the heel along a straight path, reducing risk of ankle wobble.

ARCHES Although early generations of the sole were a textured single surface, special forces found it made rope ladders harder to climb. In this, the third generation, Oakley has added an indentation in the arch to provide more purchase—which also helps civilian motorcycle riders keep their feet steady on the footpeg.

TOES Hydroplaning on water at speed and, like an aquaplaning car, you risk skidding. This sole is designed so that water displaces into the grooves, while the rest of the outsole stays in contact with the ground. Another plus for motorcyclists: put a foot down when you are stationary and it stays put, keeping you and the bike upright.

VIBRAM FIVEFINGERS

TOES When it comes to footwear, we seem stuck with the equivalent of mittens. Vibram, which provides sole designs and rubber compounds for many shoemakers, has come up with FiveFingers: the foot's equivalent of a glove. Giving each digit the ability to move and flex independently constantly exercises the muscles of your feet and toes—although whether you want stronger toes is another question.

THE BALL This sole is thicker at the ball and heel, so its hairline tread grips when the foot flexes. If you're used to pivoting on the balls of your feet, be prepared for these soles to stop you, literally, in your tracks.

ARCHES Unusually, there's no structural arch support built in to prop up your feet. Just wearing these shoes will strengthen the muscles and let them do the job. Although the overall thinness of the sole makes it less than comfortable in very cold weather, you are constantly working your foot's muscles—which keeps it surprisingly warm.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Walking doesn't require much thought, even for those who only recently took their first steps. Having learnt to operate your feet, you know how to walk, run, get round a corner, and tiptoe. Just as drivers prefer a car that provides good road-feel, your feet need feedback from the surface you're walking on. Put a shoe on, and its sole is where the rubber meets the road. Well designed shoes will improve upon the ridges and whorls that nature etched on to your soles, so that your feet stay right where you put them. — STEPHAN SOMOGYI

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIAN IRVINE

FLAIR
STYLE WITH SUBSTANCE
INTELLIGEN
WINTER 2007

Our instinct is that jewellery, real jewellery, is meant to last. It is meant to be handed down, from mother to daughter, aunt to niece; it is meant to increase in value as it becomes layered with the histories of the women who own it. Finding the piece—the ring, the necklace, the bracelet—to do that job within our own families is an emotionally weighty task.

There are several approaches. Men particularly seem to like buying rare stones: a D flawless diamond from Graff, perhaps. That's not a mistake: stones can tell stories too (think of Elizabeth Taylor, wound up in her rocks) and carry the ghosts of old loves. An extremely old, rich and arthritic English aristocrat once told me she could no longer force her mother's diamond rings—the size of Brazil nuts—over her swollen knuckles. "I'm getting them made into shoe buckles", she announced, " so that they can stay close." Did she worry, then, if she wasn't wearing them? "Oh no", she smiled, "I keep them because they remind me of Ma."

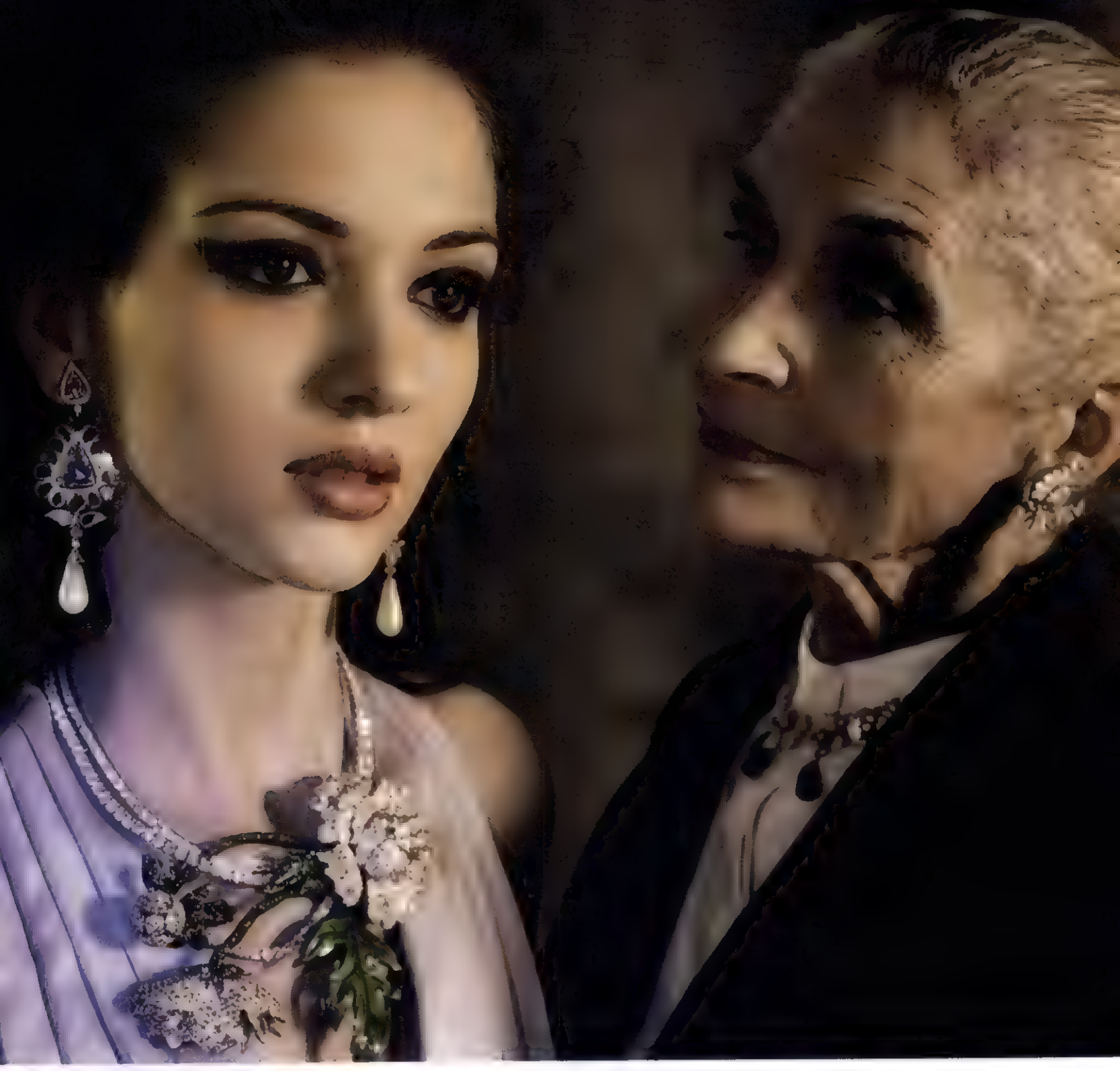
Women, on the other hand, tend to be attracted by artistry. The most feted individual designers, such as Michelle Ong in Hong Kong, or Mumbai-based Viren Bhagat, create works as instantly recognisable as a great painter's. Ong weaves strings of stones together into fantastical, highly feminine chokers like deep lace collars, whereas Bhagat's one-off, Mughal-inspired pieces play with ideas of old and new, resetting historical Indian gemstones. Both inspire fanatical loyalty, and produce the collectibles of tomorrow.

You can also look backwards, searching out pieces that display their own genealogy. Cartier's new "Inde Mystérieuse" couture collection refers to its history as the jeweller of choice for early 20th-century maharajahs, who asked the French house to reset their Indian jewels in the fashionable European style. Similarly, the tiara from Chaumet's "Attrape-Moi" collection, with its simplified spider-web motif, is directly descended from the house's "high" period of the 1860s, when its designs were inspired by a Darwinian interest in the natural world. There's something fitting about buying a piece of jewellery for the future, knowing it is aware of its own past.

But whatever the reason for choosing it, an heirloom acts as a repository of memories. Great jewellers know this: they make pieces designed to hold the stories, as well as the fortunes, of generations. These are the heirlooms of tomorrow. They all share the ability to contain something of the different women—young, old and all ages in between—who will wear them.

■

Previous page Vintage diamond and cultured-pearl tiara from Christie's London est £30,000-40,000
This page, from left Diamond and white gold earrings, Buccellati £36,400, gold and diamond pave "Swirl" ring, Asprey £2,900, platinum and diamond "Lace" bracelet, Tiffany & Co £42,900, tweed dress, Christian Dior Brushed white gold and diamond cuff, Buccellati £33,200, rose-cut diamond and platinum necklace, Michelle Ong for Carnet £POA; "Swirl" bracelet, Asprey £15,000 headpiece, Chanel couture, sleeveless wool coat, Prada, tights, Wolford Platinum and diamond line necklace with 25-carat pear-shaped drop pendant £POA, Graff; cashmere sweater, Aquascutum tweed suit, Asprey, tights, Falke

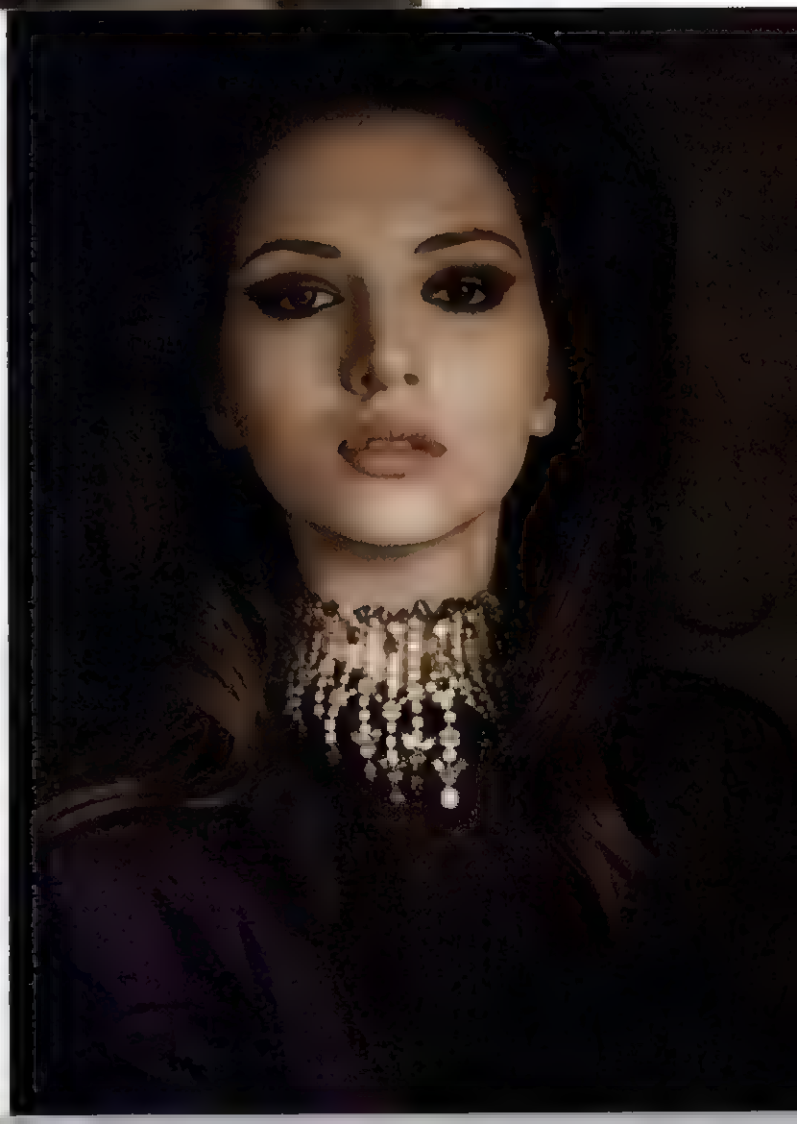


Left Vintage diamond and cultured pearl tiara, as page 46, agate and 24.17 carat diamond ring, Moussaieff £3m (part of set with 21-piece agate and diamond necklace), vintage 1930s platinum, sapphire and diamond flower brooch from Sandra Cronan £38,500, aquamarine and cluster diamond ring, Harry Winston £25,900, embroidered and crystal-beaded tulle gown Dolce & Gabbana
Above, from left Platinum set clear diamond ear pendants, Viren Bhagat £POA (privately owned), emerald, diamond and enamel "Botanée" necklace Boucheron 'Fleurs Fataises' collection £1,209,000, pleated grey silk halter neck dress, Stella McCartney Vintage 1950s diamond and pearl earrings from Sandra Cronan £85,000, cabochon emerald drop, gold and diamond "Collerette" necklace, Van Cleef & Arpels £1,343,800, silk and velvet tuxedo cotton shirt, both Asprey

Above, from left Diamond and platinum ear pendants, Cartier 'Inde Mysterieuse" collection £82 000; tsavorite diamond amethyst, pink sapphire, garnet and emerald 'Dancing Anemone' brooch, Michelle Ong for Carnet £POA; vintage Art Deco diamond bracelet,from Christie's est £50 000; white gold and diamond ring, Leviev £POA, taffeta and lace dress, Chanel Haute Couture White gold and diamond tiara, Chaumet 'Attrape-Moi" collection £19 000, white gold and diamond necklace and matching ring £POA both Chanel Haute Joaillerie 'Vendome' collection; silk chiffon ruffle dress, John Galliano
Right Brown, yellow and white diamond necklace (worn as choker), Moussaieff £450 000; silk coat Giorgio Armani
Left Emerald, yellow and white diamond earpendants, £POA, by Leviev Lace tailcoat by L'Wren Scott at Couturelab

Hair Johnnie Sapong **Make-up** Jemma Kidd **Models** Daphne @ Models 1, Martina Prekova @ IMG, Anna Arendshorst @ Next, Sophia Fisher
Production Gawain Rainey at 10 4 Inc
Sets Poppy Bartlett, hand painted wallpaper by De Gournay Dorcy, wallpaper in pewter by Colefax & Fowler
IL Production Melanie Grant

STOCKISTS **Aquascutum** www.aquascutum.com **Asprey** www.asprey.com **Viren Bhagat** +91 236 40 809 **Boucheron** www.boucheron.com **Buccellati** www.buccellati.com **Cartier** www.cartier.com **Chanel** www.chanel.com **Chaumet** www.chaumet.com **Christian Dior** www.dior.com **Christie's** www.christies.com **Colefax & Fowler** www.colefax.com **Couturelab** www.couturelab.com **De Gournay** www.degournay.com **Dolce & Gabbana** www.dolcegabbana.it **Falke** www.falke.de **Giorgio Armani** www.giorgioarmani.com **Graff** www.graffdiamonds.com **Harry Winston** www.harrywinston.com **John Galliano** www.johngalliano.com **Leviev** www.leviev.com **Michelle Ong for Carnet** www.carnetjewellery.com **Moussaieff** London +44 (0)20 7[illegible] **Prada** www.prada.com **Sandra Cronan** www.sandracronan.com **Stella McCartney** www.stellamccartney.com **Tiffany & Co** www.tiffany.com **Van Cleef & Arpels** www.vancleefarpels.com **Wolford** www.wolford.com



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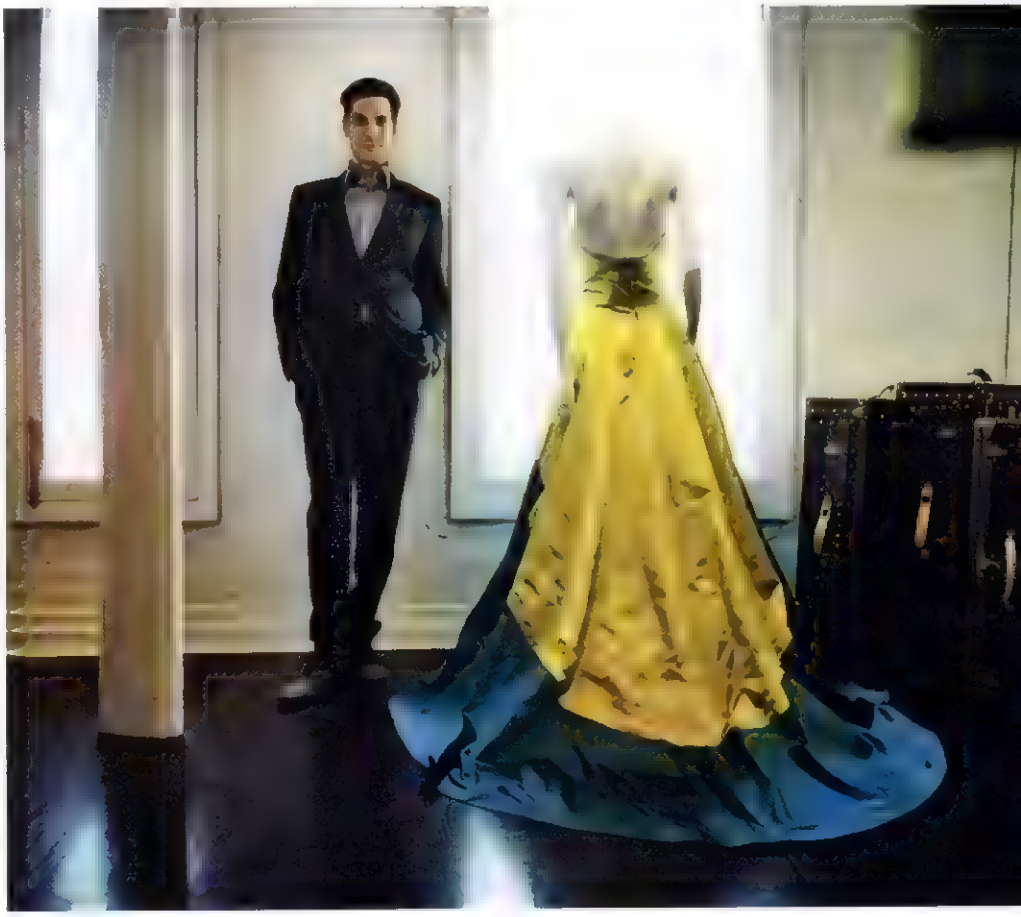
Past glories

Some clothes are for now, some are for tomorrow, and some are for ever. SARAH MOWER talks to Cameron Silver, the man who virtually invented vintage, about brands that last—and how to make gold from old

TO SPOT ONE of the most complex, hard to quantify, yet deeply influential of fashion's insider's-insiders, scan the audience at any haute couture show in Paris. There, hair slicked to the side, handkerchief tucked into an immaculately tailored breast pocket, one eyebrow mischievously cocked, will be the 36-year-old Cameron Silver, mid-*bon mot* with some Texan millionairess or offshoot of the European aristocracy. Before proceedings started, you might have observed him waving at Rachel Zoe, stylist to young Hollywood, across the runway; and as the crowd filters out, he will almost certainly be dissecting Chanel, Lacroix and Jean-Paul Gaultier amid rival clusters of American fashion editors (who are never on speaking terms with one another)—*Vogue* to the left, *Harper's Bazaar* to the right, *InStyle* over his shoulder. And afterwards? Perhaps Silver will be flitting across the Place Vendôme to introduce a lady-friend to Boucheron, his bespoke "Cameron" Hermès bag in hand. Or maybe presenting himself for tea at the apartment of a faded diva who has decided, at last, it's the right moment to entertain him.

If this reads like a sketch of a latter-day schmoozer and walker of Jerry Zipkin-like proportions, that is true: but only up to a point. As well as being a fully embedded high-society face about Paris, Los Angeles, New York and London, Cameron Silver is, more importantly, owner of Decades, the Melrose Avenue vintage boutique that has generated waves of retro fashion-trends since it opened in LA in 1996. >



CAMERON SILVER WITH A 1980S JACQUES FATH BALLGOWN
DECADES, LOS ANGELES, OCTOBER 2007
PHOTOGRAPH BY TERNEY GEARON

> Silver "acquires" from auctions, Portobello and Clignancourt markets and thrift stores. But the gems—the pristine 1950s, 1960s and 1970s gowns Decades is known for—always come from private addresses. "The *best* things", he confides, "come from the closets of chic Parisiennes." Horse-whispering glorious gowns out of significant wardrobes is just one of Silver's skills. "It's about not being an interloper," he reflects. "It's rather emotional for women to show someone the clothes they have worn through their lives. I visited someone who had been widowed recently. She showed me a 1950s Chantilly-lace dress and said, 'Cameron, this is the dress I met my husband in'."

Silver's standing stems from his being at the forefront of the two movements that have driven fashion in the past ten years. On the one hand is the practice of referencing vintage styles in today's collections. On the other is the inexorable march of celebrity culture. Silver arrived, too, just in time to help the corporate world as it looked to reinvent the identity of "heritage" brands. Gucci's designer, Tom Ford, together with his fashion-journalist partner, Richard Buckley, were early Decades-adopters. They came hunting for vintage Gucci pieces—suede and leather 1970s coats, pristine, horse-bit-laden bags and belts—to rebuild the company's archives and provide fodder for Ford's seminal mid-1990s collections. Soon after, fashion editors began to trickle in, looking for clothes to supplement retro-themed magazine stories. The journalists were followed by actresses, and their stylists, wanting something original to wear to awards ceremonies.

Rather than the regular vintage dive, filled with mothball smelling racks of junk, they found merchandise arranged like a boutique's, among exquisitely chosen mid-century modern furnishings. "I realised it was about glamour," says Silver. "I like to help a woman look beautiful for a special occasion—the right dress for the right woman. What I care about is sexy, gorgeous, stunning. That is the Decades look. We have 100 years of fashion here, but it's all chosen to look right for now."

The "vintage dealer" tag, however, is not the whole story. What Silver offers as a researcher, inspirer, fixer and taste-maker is an increasingly sought-after commodity. For his clientele, he is a fashion diviner, a below-the-radar celebrity stylist and brand consultant, who rejoices (literally; he's like that) in the titles of ambassador for the brands Boucheron and Pringle, and creative consultant for the Parisian house of Azzaro. What he does is "*terrifically* vague", he admits laconically, but in the next breath cuts to the chase: "I know what a woman wants before she wants it. I know all the stores, editors and stylists. I'm a retailer. I like to make money. It's not intellectual!"

Silver has been instrumental in changing the climate around "old" clothes and half-forgotten heroes of design. It began with him persuading French and American *grandes dames* that

VALUE ADDED: VINTAGE ZANDRA RHODES, BALENCIAGA RTW AUTUMN/WINTER 07, LANVIN RTW AUTUMN/WINTER 07

parting with classic couture dresses for melancholy reasons was actually fun—and a sharp financial move. Insane dress purchases committed in the past can now be viewed as investments—provided they're the right thing, of course.

So what is the "right thing"? If you have a 1970s Ossie Clark or Zandra Rhodes, for instance, thank Silver for adding massive bounce to its price. At Dover Street Market in London, where Silver has a mini-Decades outpost, he recently bought a cache of prime 1980s Azzedine Alaia pieces from a visitor who'd come down from Cheshire. Over in LA, the whole lot was snapped up by Victoria Beckham. "The original owner was amused to know where it had gone," says Silver. "Seeing your clothes have a new life can be very validating for a woman's sense of style."

And now, if you've been inadvertently clever with your foolish impulse buys, you don't have to wait a generation to get the cash back. Silver's latest spin-off, Decadestwo, in conjunction with his partner, Christos Garlinkos, has taken the shame and dinginess out of reselling recent fashion regrets. Silver calls it "Twenty-first century designer consignment. Pre-owned or often unworn clothes and accessories from the closets of the world's heavy shoppers: the 2,000 best-dressed women in the world!" Decadestwo is an online business as well as a walk-in store; both are highly successful. Silver's sellers and buyers are all, as he notes "incredibly wealthy women. It's not about bargain basement. But you can sit here and see one woman come in to buy her neighbour's Chloé bag, and it's cool with everyone."

Watching all this has qualified Silver to be a walking human index, who knows the value of every piece of designer clothing bought and sold today. If you want to know which clothes will keep their value in any future resale market—and which definitely won't—he's the man. "It's really interesting to see what has an afterlife and what doesn't. It's the less distributed, less promoted labels that do well: Lanvin, Stella McCartney, Balenciaga. But all those brands that are so hyper-advertised?" He smiles. "You can't give the stuff away." ■

INVESTMENT DRESSES

Cameron Silver's pick of today's brands for tomorrow

Lanvin: "Alber Elbaz's latest ready-to-wear collection is his finest yet—but it's not ubiquitous and in every store Everybody will want it."

Balenciaga: "Again, the autumn/winter ready-to-wear pieces aren't in every shop and every billboard on every corner. But [Nicolas] Ghesquière has an enormous cult following."

Stella McCartney: "Anything Stella that comes into Decadestwo flies straight back out of the door."

Alexander McQueen: "The menswear tailoring is quite brilliant. I bought a tux from him this year and I will have it for ever."

DRESS SENSE

The waist

Roland Mouret, creator of the hourglass Galaxy dress, discusses the bit in your middle

Why are designers suddenly emphasising waists?
There is a new body shape in the air: we're saying goodbye to the cigarette-skinny, size-zero look. Clothes without waists are very androgynous; but once you mark the waist, you give a kind of pinch to an outfit and make it womanly. Such clothes suit a woman better: she doesn't have to be a very, very young girl to look good in them.

What does a waist do for a woman?
It's really funny: when you emphasise the waist in clothes, you stop noticing size. For instance, my Galaxy dress (*above*) had five tricks, one of which was to make the waist one inch smaller than it would be for a standard fit. All the women who wore that dress were very different—from sizes 6 to 14—and yet when you saw pictures of them wearing it, you could never say what size they were. It's because, in people's minds, the inward dip from the hip into the waist is an indicator not of fat, but of femininity. It's just a perfect curve.

Who else does a waist well?
Azzedine Alaia. He is a master. And in a certain way, Miuccia Prada. When she chooses to make a waist, she knows how—although men don't find a Prada waist sexy: Prada is too complicated for that. Men are simple creatures, after all. We like a nice simple Alaia with a little flick in the skirt.

Other than a fitted dress, what one thing will give you a waist?
Oh, a pair of Christian Louboutin heels. They will make you stand up properly—and then, *voilà*, you have a waist!

INTERVIEW BY ISABEL LLOYD

GLOBAL TRADING *Stationers* Five stores that look good on paper

IL PAPIRO FLORENCE

An old-fashioned, family-owned boutique (*above*) famous for *carta marmorizzata*: marbled paper, locally handmade using natural dye brushed into swirling, feathery patterns. Look out for its notebooks with musical staff—a choice gift for a budding composer. ~ HEATHER O'BRIAN

55 Via Cavour, Florence; www.ilpapirofirenze.it Tel +39 055 215262

KATE'S PAPERIE NEW YORK

Stacks of leather-bound journals bursting with creamy, rough-edged paper vie for space with gem-coloured ribbons (*left*) and cloth-wrapped boxes with drawers for wax seals. Our epistolary favourite? Thick-stock, lime green Vera Wang notecards. ~ EMILY BOBROW

72 Spring Street, New York, NY 10012, www.katespaperie.com Tel +1 (212) 941 9816

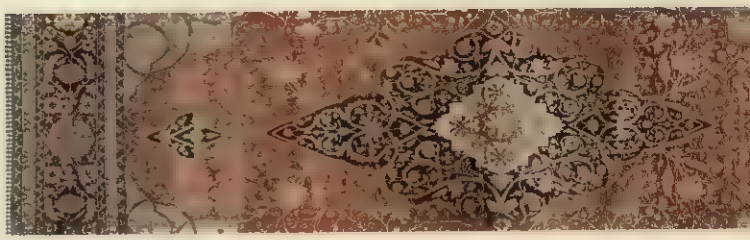
HAZLITZ LONDON
In a Chelsea townhouse, order your bespoke stationery "wardrobe" on paper from around the world—if you want envelopes lined in paisley pat terns from Japan, so be it. The ready to-write range comes on Hazlitz's buttery smooth, 100% cotton signature paper. ~ RACHEL BROWN
18 Coulson Street, London SW3, www hazlitz com
Tel· +44 (0)20 7225 7590

SOOLIP LOS ANGELES
Everything in Soolip's whitewashed vintage cabinets is either hand-made, recycled, or a combination of the two. Tactile greeting cards are decorated with pressed flowers or feathers, or quirky illustrations in the latest shade of ecru; handmade cotton wrap is sold, like fabric, from giant rolls. ~ SARA WILSON
8646 Melrose Avenue
West Hollywood, LA 90069
www.soolip com
Tel· +1 (310) 360 0545

MARIE PAPIER PARIS
Marie-Paule Orluc's discreet, Left Bank boutique—which features her collection of artisan paper, hand-made notebooks and luxurious, understated stationery—has sup-plied fashion houses from Hermès to Lanvin. "I put together paper and colours just like a couturier working with fabric," says Ms Orluc Cotton "rag paper", suede-bound notebooks, supple leather mouse mats in bronze and amber, ribbon-wrapped note cards in the season's shades—it's all here Kristin Scott Thomas, the actress, has her corre-spondence cards made here; if you wish to follow her lead, personalised stationery starts at €200 ~ SARAH DALLAS
26 rue Vavin, Paris 75006; www.mariepapier.fr.
Tel· +33 (0)1 43 26 46 44

Edited by Sarah Dallas
www.economist.com/cities

INSIDER TRADING
Persian carpets



William Robinson, director of Christie's Islamic and carpet department, shares the secret of buying the ultimate in floor coverings

To buy a Persian carpet is to acquire one of humanity's most ancient arts. The Hermitage museum has a carpet, discovered in a frozen Siberian tomb, from the 5th century BC, showing a technique that's already fully developed.

All true Persian carpets are woven in Iran, and take their name from either the town or region they are woven in, or the tribe that wove them. Within those bounds there is huge variety: they may use Persian, asymmetric knots, or Turkish, symmetrical knots; they may be made of wool, silk, cotton, goat hair, camel hair…but as long as they are made in Iran, they are all Persian rugs.

Whether to buy new or old is a personal choice. A new rug is like a new car: it will immediately lose value. But modern carpets appeal to the modern aesthetic: more limited palettes, paler colours using overall, scaled-up designs, not central medallions on solid grounds. These, along with smaller, more strongly coloured accent rugs, are what sell, and re-sell, well

Walk around a rug. You'll see how the colours change with the fall of the wool and the light. Healthy wool is shiny wool, so it will have a light sheen, and it should feel flexible—stiffness can be a sign of old damp damage. Look at the back: a new rug should never have a join in it, though older rugs may show "lazy lines" where the work of one weaver meets the work of another.

To keep its value, choose the best rug you can find within your budget. Although £2,000 is the entry-level price for a top appella-tion, such as Kashan Mohtasham, it would be far better to spend the same amount on an outstanding example of a lesser name, woven using the particularly good "kurk" wool, from the sheep's underbelly (A rug made of fine merino wool, by the way, is not necessarily a good purchase: coarse wool, from tough, uncosseted sheep, lasts centuries, but merino wears as quickly as it grows.)

There are some excellent antique- and new-carpet dealers in London, Milan, Stockholm and New York, among others. Wher-ever you buy a Persian carpet, though, choose one you find beautiful Beauty, after all, is their point.

INTERVIEW BY ISABEL LLOYD

ADDRESS BOOK
Christie's, 8 King St, London SW1; www christies com
Tel: +44 (0)20 7839 9060
C.John, 70 South Audley St, London W1; www.cjohn.com.
Tel· +33 (0)20 7493 5288
Moshe Tabibnia, Via Brera, Milan, www moshetabibnia com.
Tel +39 02 805 1545
J.P. Willborg, Sibyllegatan 41, Stockholm; www.jpwillborg com
Tel +46 8 783 0265
F.J. Hakimian, 136 East 57th St, New York, NY 10022, www.fjhakimian.com.
Tel +1 (212) 371-6900

"In my opinion, it's the ability to bring together a range of diverse elements to create an outstanding driving experience."
Bernd Pletschen, Head Acoustician at Mercedes-Benz.

The satisfying 'clunk' of the car door as it closes. The understated 'tick' of the indicators. The gratifying growl of the engine as it accelerates. For Bernd Pletschen, all these sounds must be seamlessly orchestrated. From conception to completion of the car, his mission is to fine-tune the various components until perfect harmony is achieved. At Julius Baer, we too understand the importance of harmonious interplay. By fine-tuning our spectrum of financial products and services to your needs, we're able to create exceptional investment solutions for private and institutional clients alike. Solutions which are driven by you.

You can find the entire interview with Bernd Pletschen at www.juliusbaer.com/excellence
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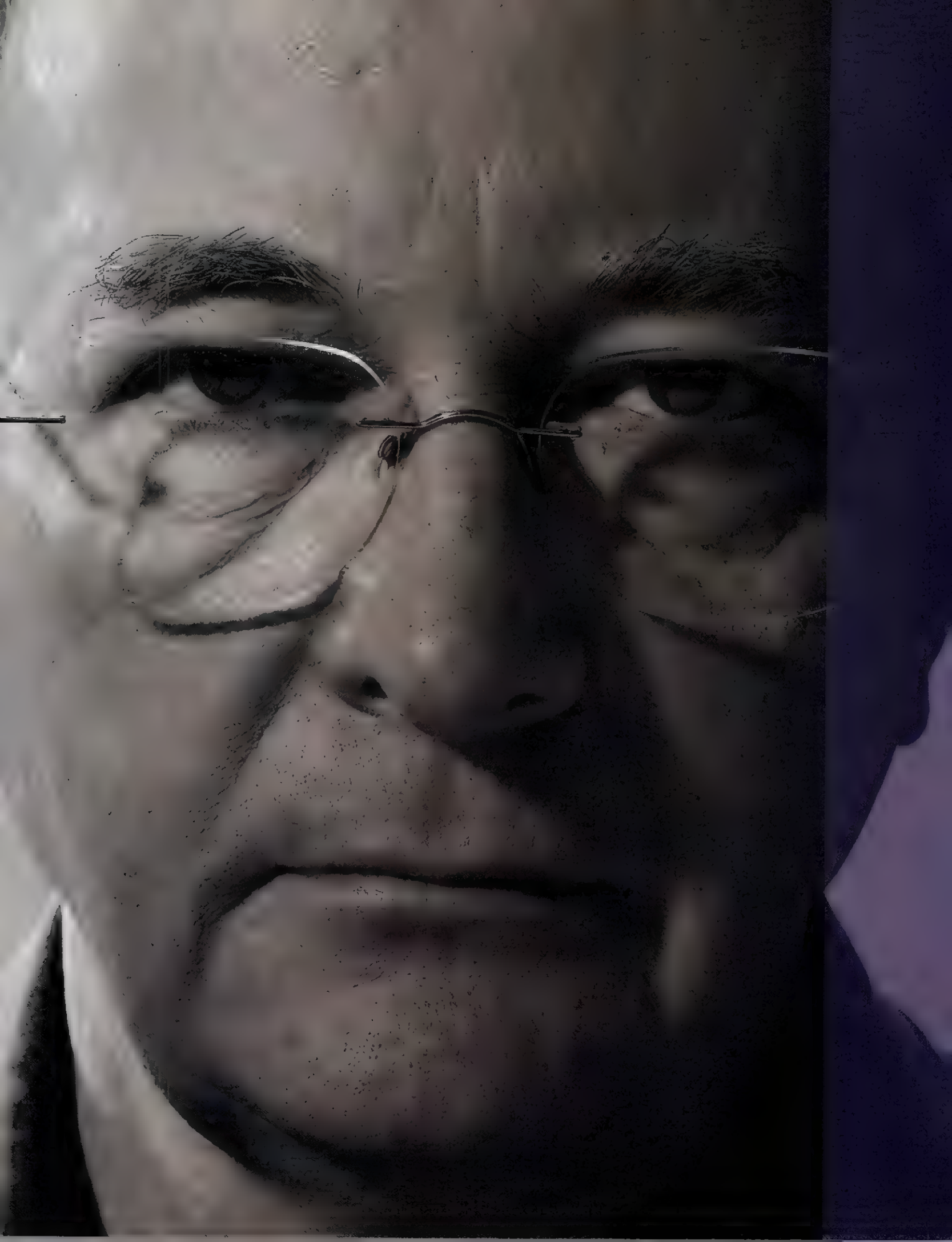
ONE PERFECT *Lamp*

ICE LIGHT ROUGIER (c1970)

It's not really an ice light, of course: its seven pulled-toffee spires are made of white acrylic. But as Rougier, the short-lived Canadian lighting manufacturer, numbered rather than named its products, you can call it whatever you wish. "Snow Crown"? "Plastic Fantastic"? Certainly few understood this most 1970s of materials as well as Rougier, though its fantastical, fecund designs—typically, a series of organic shapes wrapped around a central well of light—are only now being rediscovered. Put this metre-high lamp where viewers can circle around it, and they'll see from every angle just how surprising moulded polymethyl methacrylate can be. – KIT KEMP

Rougier lamps: from £2,000 (€2,880) from Tallsman, 79-91 New Kings Rd, London SW6; www.tallsmanlondon.com. Tel +44 (0)20 7731 4686. Photographed at Absolut Icebar London; www.absoluticebarlondon.com

PHOTOGRAPH BY SIAN IRVINE



Genesis, Milton, this man

Philip Pullman thought his epic tale of two 12-year-olds would appeal to a few clever kids and a few adults. Then it sold 15 million and now it's a blockbusting film. Its success goes all the way back to his time as an English teacher. ROBERT BUTLER goes to lunch with him

PHILIP PULLMAN
OXFORD OCTOBER 2007
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JILLIAN EDELSTEIN

THE LADY WITH THE ERMINE
LEONARDO DA VINCI, 1490

NICOLE KIDMAN AS MRS COULTER
ON LOCATION SEPTEMBER 2006

HE HAD WRITTEN fairy tales, detective stories, melodramas, thrillers and fantasies, but when Philip Pullman embarked on his trilogy, "His Dark Materials", he went back to the most fundamental story of all: the one with the snake, the apple and the fig leaf. He recast Adam and Eve as a 12-year-old girl and boy living in parallel universes, who meet, fall in love and spend the night together. This time God, known as the Authority, fades away and dies. "I thought there would be a small audience," Pullman says, "a few clever kids somewhere and a few intelligent adults who thought, 'That's all right, quite enjoyed it.'" Well, he got that wrong.

The books have been translated into 40 languages and sold 15m copies, and that's only the beginning. In 2003 and 2004, a stage version was a big hit at the National Theatre in London. This month the phenomenon goes to another level with the release of the film, starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig. It's produced by New Line, which brought us "The Lord of the Rings" 1, 2 and 3. By the time New Line has worked its way through the trilogy, Pullman's rewrite of Genesis 3 will have gone far beyond its bedtime-reading, Waterstone's-shopping, theatre-going constituency. It will have become a story known by people who may not even read.

"His Dark Materials" has its origins in the writings of Milton, Blake and Kleist, but if that sounds literary and erudite, don't worry, it won't show: this is a big-budget fantasy movie playing at a cinema near you, and near pretty well everyone else. Its main characters—Lyra, Mrs Coulter, Lee Scoresby—will shortly be as famous as Dumbledore and Gandalf. But there's a difference. Pullman has written an epic with the entertainment value to capture a mass audience, which simultaneously taps into the same profound themes as Homer and the Bible. It's a story with a dark and powerful undertow: a creation myth for the 21st century.

Its author sits in the study of his farmhouse near Oxford surrounded by books, Black & Decker woodwork equipment, and a rocking horse that he's making for a grandchild. Two pugs, Hoagy and Nellie, run in and out. Next door, our photographer and her two assistants are transforming his kitchen into a photographic studio. ("I've never been on a front cover, have I?" Pullman says to his wife, Jude, who greets this invasionary force with warm and unconcerned tolerance.) During the shoot, his broad face and high-domed forehead change dramatically when he dons

BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY, NEW LINE PRODUCTION

a wide-brimmed hat (a little reluctantly) and a beret (more enthusiastically): as an author, he would rather be cast as a Paris intellectual than a Tory squire.

On the dining-room table next door, a pile of new publications and spin-offs sits next to a picture of Pullman with the new James Bond. "His Dark Materials" comprises three books, "Northern Lights" (1995), "The Subtle Knife" (1997) and "The Amber Spyglass" (2000). It's "Northern Lights" that has been made into the movie, "The Golden Compass"—the name it had been given in American bookshops. Genesis 3 runs to 24 verses; "His Dark Materials" weighs in at 1,300 pages. Pullman spent seven years in a shed at the bottom of his Oxford garden, doing his three pages a day (no more, no less). About one in ten pages made the cut. The mathematics alone is impressive.

IT ALL BEGAN in the last 15 minutes of a wet Friday afternoon in a classroom in Oxford. Or that's how you would want to tell it. After reading English at Exeter College, Oxford, Pullman did stints working at Moss Bros, the suit-hire shop, and a public library. Aged 25, he qualified as a teacher, mainly, he says, because he liked the idea of the holidays. It was the early 1970s, there was no National Curriculum, no Sats and league tables, and "no bumptious ignorant twit in Whitehall telling me what to do and how to teach". So Pullman found that he had time to tell stories. He believes all teachers should be able to tell a story "at a moment's notice to a class for the last quarter of an hour on a wet Friday afternoon". Not read it, he insists—tell it. "If you're reading out of a book all the time, nothing changes. But if you tell it face to face, you improvise a bit, you play around..."

He set about this task in a typically deliberate way. In the first term, he decided, he would do the births and deaths of the gods and goddesses, their natures and deeds; in the second term he would do the origins of the Trojan war, which would segue into "The Iliad"; and in the third term, he would do "The Odyssey". He prepared each week's story thoroughly so he could tell it without notes. He was teaching three separate classes, which meant telling each episode three times in a week. Again, the maths is impressive. "I must have told each story 36 times."

It was a perfect apprenticeship, giving him "an unsupervised, unnoticed little area of ground" to cultivate his own talent and find out what kinds of stories he could tell. Others might be good at making people laugh; he wasn't particularly. "But I was good at doing exciting stuff that kept them listening." He was drawn to a world of "once upon a time", "meanwhile", and "suddenly", of hidden hands and knocks on the door, of dark, stormy nights, shadows and surprises, ogres and—time and again—orphans. He says he couldn't do the storytelling now. "I'd be sacked, I'd go to prison: 'You're not fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum! Away with you!'"

At each school where he taught, Pullman wrote >

It all began in the last 15 minutes of a wet Friday afternoon in a classroom in Oxford. Or that's how you would want to tell it

> and produced the end-of-term plays, which enabled him to reach another captive audience: the parents. He treated the parents and children as one audience (he dislikes the business of throwing in sophisticated jokes for the grown-ups) and wrote for both age groups at the same time. "I got better at it. It's to do with taking your story seriously, laughing, yes, but never scoffing at it, always taking the story seriously."

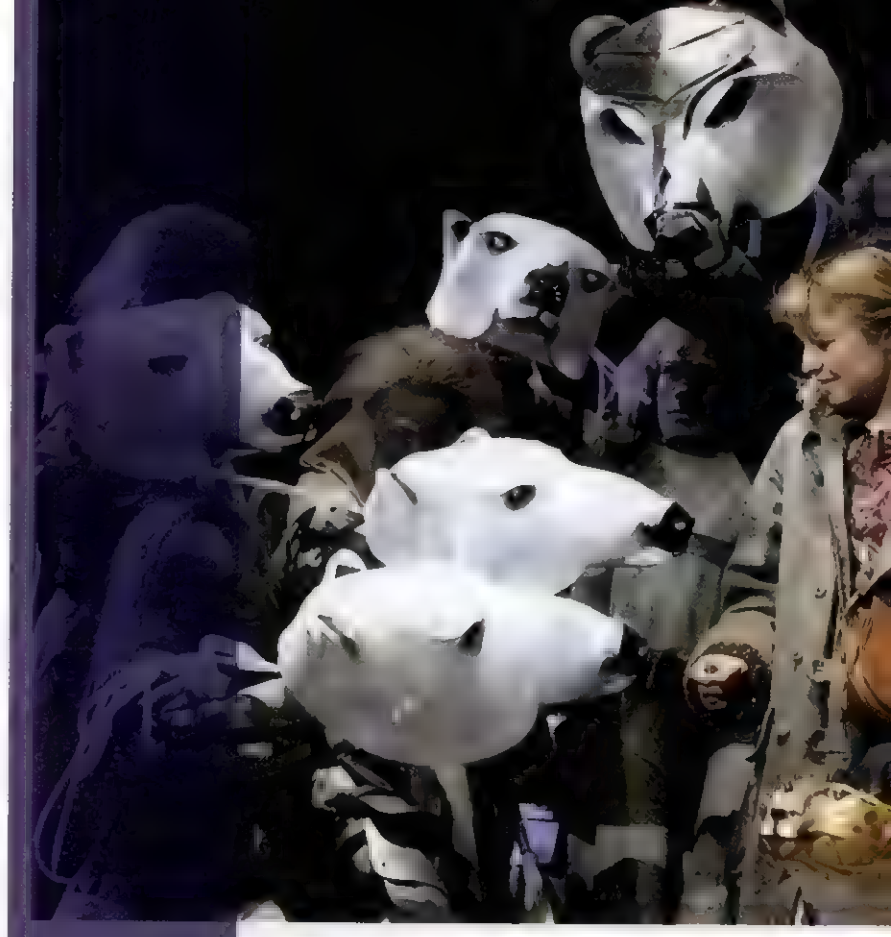
His inspiration came from a family-run toy shop in Covent Garden. "I wanted costumes, I wanted colour and spectacle. My source for all this was toy theatre, those lovely little things that you can get from Pollocks. I've got the lot. I discovered them as a grown-up and fell in love with them." Some of his school plays became children's books: "Clockwork", "Count Karlstein" and "The Firework-Maker's Daughter". Go into a bookshop and Pullman can be found between Marcel Proust and Mario Puzo on the fiction shelves, and between Terry Pratchett and Arthur Ransome in the children's section. The only difference is the cover.

When Pullman got home from school in the evenings, his eldest son would be doing his music practice (he is now a professional viola player) and Pullman would go to his shed at the bottom of the garden. He is the most successful writer since Roald Dahl to have worked in a shed. "My real life began", he says, "when I came home from the job and sat at my table and wrote three pages for the day."

No one could accuse Pullman of under-researching his subject: the heroine of "His Dark Materials" is a 12-year-old tomboy called Lyra Belacqua and Pullman spent 12 years teaching girls of this age. He taught at three schools in Oxford, one working-class, one middle-class, one in between. The working-class pupils, whose parents mostly worked at the car factories, were very direct and let him know immediately what they thought. The middle-class pupils, many of whose parents were dons, had subtler ways of expressing their disapproval. The three schools were diverse in socio-economic terms, but he discovered that within the classroom the same patterns of behaviour applied. There were certain roles that always had to be filled: the clown, the smelly one who no one wanted to sit next to, and the king and queen.

"If you work out quickly in the first couple of days who the king and queen are, and you direct all your attention to them in the first week or so, get them on your side, you won't have any discipline problems because everyone follows them. They don't follow you. They follow them."

The girls in particular fell into two groups. "There were the sophisticated ones who knew all the words to the pop songs and were aware of style and fashion. The most precocious of those had a boyfriend. They'd give themselves airs, they were café society, they were little Paris Hiltons. And there was another group. They weren't quite as grown-up as that and still liked little ponies and



HIS DARK MATERIALS: A PULLMAN PRIMER

This 1,300-page epic begins like C S Lewis's "Narnia" in a wardrobe, when Lyra, 12, eavesdropping on her explorer-uncle, Lord Asriel, hears him discuss a mysterious substance called "dust". In this multi-universe story, Lyra lives in a parallel 'Oxford' where the church is cruel and children are kidnapped by "gobblers"

When her friend Roger disappears, Lyra and her daemon, Pantalaimon (an animal spirit) go in search, sailing to the Arctic. On the way Lyra recruits her own team, like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" or Yul Brynner in "The Magnificent Seven" (a favourite Pullman film), which comprises an armoured bear, a Texan aeronaut and the queen of the witches

In the Arctic Lyra discovers the evil experiments perpetrated by the glamorous Mrs Coulter and the church. A massive explosion leads Lyra into another world, where she meets Will, also 12, searching for his father. Will becomes the inheritor of the Subtle Knife, which cuts holes between universes

Lyra and Will travel to the land of the dead, where they release Roger and other ghosts through the art of truthful story-telling. In the ensuing battle between angels, the god-like "Authority" dies. Will and Lyra find themselves, all-too-briefly, in a Garden of Eden, where they cannot stay

ARENAPAL

brought me presents and wrote [cards] with a big loop, even a heart-shape, over the letter i." He noticed that if a girl fell out of one group and joined the other, she instantly took on the attributes of the new group.

In the novels Pullman dramatises this shift from innocence to experience through the device of daemons. Everyone has a daemon or animal spirit: when you are young, the daemon keeps changing shape; as you get older your daemon settles into a constant form. The daemons are the single most brilliant idea in the books. Pullman got the idea from paintings by Leonardo da Vinci (The Lady with the Ermine), Holbein (The Lady and the Squirrel) and Tiepolo (Young Woman with a Macaw), where there seems to be a psychological link between the person and the creature. Six years earlier, in his children's story "Spring-Heeled Jack", he prefigures this idea with a mournful moth who flutters around as the villain's conscience. The first four words of "His Dark Materials", "Lyra and her daemon…", are the four most important in the trilogy. Everything follows from that.

"I had been thinking about the central question, which is the innocence and experience business, and the transition which happens in adolescence, for a long time. I'd been teaching children of the same age as Lyra, children who were themselves going through this physical, intellectual and emotional change in their lives. The biggest change we ever go through really." Once, when I interviewed Pullman in front of a packed house at the National Theatre, he drew a big laugh when he explained what was so special about this age: "Your life begins when you are born, but your life story begins at that moment when you discover that you are in the wrong family."

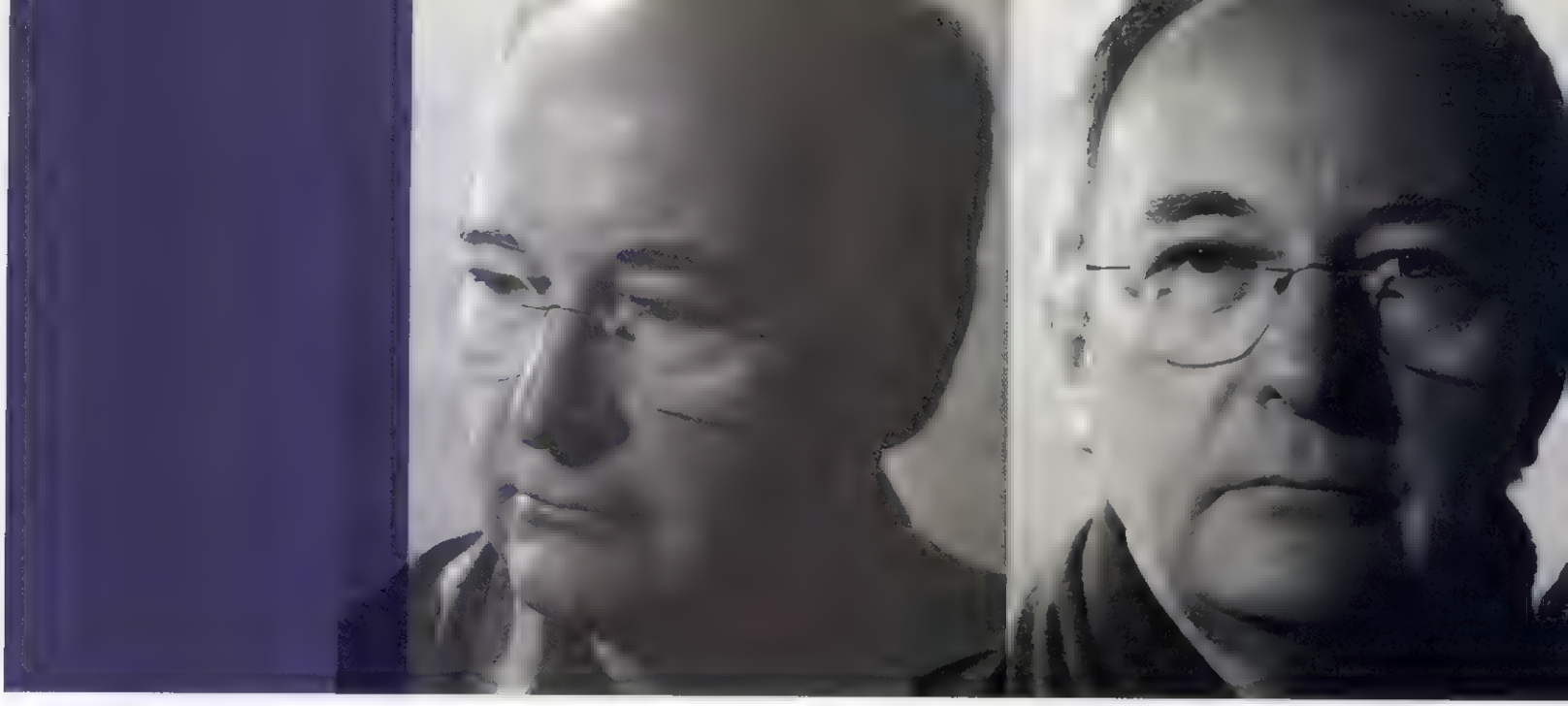
THE ONLY TIME an author has any influence over a script, Pullman once told me, is when he sells the rights. He later refined this thought, telling another interviewer that you can't intervene in the early stages of film-making because it's like pushing at fog and you can't intervene in the later stages because you're pushing against a brick wall, but there is a stage in between when it's like pushing at a heavy wheeled object, so it's worth a try. Pullman has followed the making of "The Golden Compass" from a distance. The movie's first screenwriter Tom Stoppard came round for lunch. Pullman read various drafts, then Stoppard left the production, and the director Chris Weitz wrote new versions. Pullman read those and has written some bits himself. He was keen never to be officially employed by the film company: "It means I can tell them to bugger off."

I had first met Pullman in 2003 when writing "The Art of Darkness", a backstage account of the National Theatre production. He told me then: "I'm fundamentally a storyteller, not a literary person, if I can make that distinction. If I wrote a story that had enough vigour and life to pass into common currency and be recounted by people who had no idea that I was the author, nothing would give me greater pleasure."

On one point, however, he did express a firm opinion to the film-makers. "From a very early stage I was keen on promoting the idea of Mrs Coulter being played by Nicole Kidman." Mrs Coulter is the elegant, icy villainess, who adopts the heroine. One performance of Kidman's made him want her for the role: " 'To Die For', where she plays the weather girl who's murderously working her way up the corporate ladder." Kidman has made one notable change to the character. "I'd described Mrs Coulter's hair as black. I was clearly wrong. You sometimes are wrong about your characters. She's blonde. She has to be." He is full of praise for Kidman's blonde incarnation. "When she raises an eyebrow, the temperature in the room drops by ten degrees."

The fictional world that Pullman creates is dominated by a cruel and repressive church. The Reformation seems not to have taken place, and Jesus barely exists. Many people have taken offence at this portrait of the church. The Association of Christian Teachers urged its members to boycott the stage production. The *Mail on Sunday* described Pullman as "the most dangerous author in Britain". Most recently, the American-based Catholic League has called for a boycott of the film on the grounds that it "sells atheism to kids".

Is he expecting controversy? He pauses: "I am beset, not beset, that's too strong, I am attended by crazy people." The day before our interview he had given a reading at the Sheldonian Theatre as part of the Oxford Chamber Music Festival. There were 750 children from primary schools in the Oxford area listening to music and readings. A small boy from one of the schools was taken out "rather ostentatiously" before each of Pullman's readings >



After lights-out, he would tell stories to his younger brother, not knowing how they would end

> and brought back in again when the reading was over. "Apparently his parents objected to his hearing anything of mine on the grounds that he might go to hell if he did."

Pullman says that people who are tempted to take offence should first see the film or read the books. "They'll find a story that attacks such things as cruelty, oppression, intolerance, unkindness, narrow-mindedness, and celebrates love, kindness, open-mindedness, tolerance, curiosity, human intelligence. It's very hard to disagree with those. But people will."

How will he respond to those attacks? "A soft answer turneth away wrath, as it says in my favourite book." (Proverbs 15:1.) So he won't argue back? "It's a foolish thing for the teller of a story to answer critics. If you're putting forward an argument, you can argue back and demonstrate why your argument is better than theirs. But if someone doesn't like a story you've written, what are you going to say? 'Well, you should'?"

TWO EARLY MOMENTS were pivotal in turning Pullman into a writer. The first occurred in the mid-1950s, when he was nine. His father, an RAF pilot, had been killed in Kenya during the Mau Mau conflict. His mother remarried soon after, and the family sailed to Australia. It was here that Pullman first came across comics and drama serials on the radio: "Clancy of the Outback", "Dick Barton" and "The Adventures of Superman". Pullman "devoured" them. He "brooded" over them endlessly. After lights-out, he would tell stories of his own to his younger brother (his first captive audience), not knowing each night when he started a story, how it would end.

After Australia, the family settled in North Wales. Pullman found an inspirational English teacher at the local school who introduced him to "Paradise Lost". He says he wasn't responding along the lines of "'here's an interesting argument, yes, I agree with it.' I was moved physically, emotionally and intellectually by the language." He learnt "yards" of Milton. When he began writing "His Dark Materials" (the title itself comes from Milton), he realised after a while that he was telling the same story. "But I didn't think on the one hand, 'Oh, bugger, I'm telling the same story', or, on the other hand, 'Oh great, I can copy it.' I just realised that in his patch Milton had been working on the same thing. And a long time ago the original writer of the book of Genesis had been working on the same story."

Several times Pullman reminds me that a work of fiction is not an argument. Perhaps it's safest to say that in "His Dark Materials" he has constructed his own imaginative world so as not to submit to anyone else's. He likes to quote William Blake's line: "I must create a system, or be enslav'd by another man's." His story is a rival to the narratives put forward by two earlier Oxford writers, J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and C.S. Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia". Pullman loathes the way the children in Narnia are killed in a car-crash. "I dislike his Narnia books because of the solution he offers to the great questions of human life: is there a God, what is the purpose, all that stuff, which he really does engage with pretty deeply, unlike Tolkien who doesn't touch it at all. 'The Lord of the Rings' is essentially trivial. Narnia is essentially serious, though I don't like the answer Lewis comes up

with. If I was doing it at all, I was arguing with Narnia. Tolkien is not worth arguing with."

Pullman clearly enjoys an argument; Bernard Shaw, after all, is one of his favourite authors. He draws the line at discussing issues with fundamentalists. "You can't communicate with people who know they've got all the answers." His measured, sometimes schoolmasterly demeanour, making nicely balanced rational points (that he has no doubt made before), masks a fierier, more combative nature. As he clears away our lunch in the kitchen—bowls of chicken Thai soup and a plate of whiffy cheese—he talks about a flashy young TV director who fouled up an adaptation of one of his stories. As Pullman offers up one example after another of the director's cluelessness, his hands clasp the table and his face reddens: he is vehement in his disdain.

For Pullman, there's a morality to good craftsmanship. As a young man he wrote verse and studied every kind of poetic metre he could—rondeaus, villanelles, sonnets and sestinas—the more complicated the better. He believes that if you can recognise rhythm and cadence in poetry, then you can do so in prose. It's not hard to see him extending the principle of good craftsmanship more generally. A bad politician is one who reaches beyond his or her capabilities, who doesn't understand how societies are constructed, and who screws things up.

After the soup and cheese, he returns to his armchair in the study and his anger mounts again, when our discussion about climate change ("without question the biggest issue of our time"), leads to the war on terror and Iraq. He says that George Bush is "a moral criminal", and Tony Blair has "a great deal to be apologetic for. Not that he ever will [apologise]. Armoured with his self-righteousness, he will never admit, even to himself, that [the Iraq war] was a ghastly mistake. A terrible, terrible error." Pullman has particular contempt for the sloganeering. He says "the war on terror" is "an utterly stupid phrase. Utterly, ridiculously foolish phrase. No one should ever have used it. Certainly no British politician should ever have repeated it."

Pullman prefers to get involved in politics on a local level, joining the campaign to save a local boatyard from misguided development. In his study there's a model of a wooden boat he's constructing. As a craftsman, he pointed out to me, he is a joiner (not a carpenter); as a citizen, he rarely joins anything. "I'm not an activist," he says, "I'm a passive-ist." But he's increasingly besieged by his admirers, receiving countless invitations "to open a conference, speak at a festival, dedicate a library, write an article, join a campaign".

Most troubling of all is the scale of the fan-mail. He gets hundreds of e-mails and letters. "It's a great source of..." He is momentarily lost for words. "It makes you sigh. Either you ignore these letters and feel bad about it and guilty about it or you take the time and trouble to answer them. And then you regret the time you're not spending on your work." He used to reply to them all. Some writers have piles of unopened letters in the corner of their study, but he worries about finding himself at the other end of the spectrum. "The other way to deal with it was Margaret Mitchell, who wrote "Gone With The Wind". She spent the rest of her life answering letters."

Pullman's grandfather was an Anglican vicar, who could also take the smallest incident and turn it into a story. Was there a time when Pullman believed his grandfather's stories about God?

"When I was a small boy, I believed implicitly everything my grandfather told me. He was grandpa. He knew."

Does he feel a sense of loss now?

"Loss?"

Or sense of absence?

"Loss because there's something gone that I used to believe? I really don't think so. I think it's a gain. It's a gain of a wider perspective. It would be like saying do you feel rather sad that we know the Earth's not flat any more? No, actually, I feel rather better knowing the Earth's round. It's more interesting."

■

"The Golden Compass" goes on general release in the United Kingdom and most of Europe on December 7th

Forty years ago, the world went wild. But how much really changed? MATTHEW ENGEL travels back in time to find out

IT WAS MAY 29th 1968—towards the end of what was probably the most dramatic month of certainly the most dramatic year of the second half of the 20th century.

There was a workers' march in Paris, by no means the first that May. There was no hint of violence or confrontation, which meant the protest barely constituted news at all. The original student rioting had mutated into a general strike, and the police had more or less withdrawn—along with President Charles de Gaulle, whose whereabouts were unknown. There was an eerie calm.

"I had the feeling", recalled Edward Mortimer, then a young Paris correspondent for the *Times*, "that had they just turned off the route and gone in to the courtyard of the Elysée Palace, no one would have stopped them, and that would have been the end of it."

"It" meant de Gaulle's decade of almost absolute power, the Fifth Republic he created, and—perhaps—the entire political structure of the Western world, then besieged by a host of different clamouring enemies. Indeed, Mortimer's erudite colleague, Patrick Brogan, wrote an obituary for the Fifth Republic ("...its end marches its beginning") for the following day's paper. That was the day de Gaulle reappeared and started a spectacular fightback. His disappearance had been to Germany, to consult secretly with his military commanders and test the loyalty of the troops. The Fifth Republic lives yet.

Any history of 1968 is full of if onlys, what ifs, counterfactuals and might-have-beens. You can construct a zillion parallel universes of what could have happened if a single event had turned out a fraction differently. The reality was astonishing enough. And, as the 40th anniversary approaches, the year continues to maintain a remarkable grip on anyone with a sense of modern history.

There was quite simply an eruption: a global explosion of political, cultural and social energy that was at once both thrilling and terrifying. It had been rumbling and spitting for at least five years beforehand (since 1963, the year Philip Larkin said sexual intercourse was invented) and continued to send out lava flows for some time after that. The activist and writer Tariq Ali dates the real end of '68 as the Portuguese revolution of 1974.

There was also a short version of '68—that brief period when, as on that Paris march, almost anything seemed possible: when "the revolution" (whatever that might have

ALEX TROCHUT

> meant), as discussed in a thousand French cafés, and dingy student dormitories and flats across the world, felt like an imminent certainty.

Perhaps that even ended on May 30th, when de Gaulle regained control of France. It was certainly over by the end of summer, when reformers were crushed in places as disparate as Prague and Chicago. By December, enough calm had returned for *Time* magazine to name as its men of the year the three American astronauts who spent Christmas escaping the increasingly surly bonds of Earth to orbit (but not land on) the moon in *Apollo 8*: Borman, Lovell and Anders. That did seem to miss the point somehow.

BUT WHAT WAS the point? All year, there was a seemingly endless supply of startling global headlines. However, it is still hard to discern a coherent picture in the mosaic.

The unifying factor is that across the developed world and even beyond, people—specifically the young and most specifically students—challenged established authority. Sometimes they did this violently and sometimes this invited violent consequences. Inevitably, American concerns linked in to everyone else's. The United States was obsessed with the intractable war in Vietnam. And there was a very obvious tipping point.

On January 30th nearly 70,000 Communist fighters (North Vietnamese soldiers and Viet Cong guerrillas) broke the truce agreed on for the Vietnamese New Year—*Tet*—and surged out of the countryside into the cities, including the seemingly immune capital of American-backed South Vietnam, Saigon. Their most spectacular feat was a briefly successful commando raid on the American embassy.

Until this point, the guiding narrative had been provided by American officialdom. President Lyndon Johnson believed the war was necessary and winnable; his commander in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, constantly assured him and the folks back home it was being won. Now even Johnson began to doubt.

In February Walter Cronkite, the avuncular anchorman of CBS News, went to Vietnam to see for himself. His reporting was sceptical, perplexed; he could see no victory. "If I've lost Cronkite," Johnson reportedly remarked, "I've lost middle America."

Tet changed everything. The military's response was to demand a surge: 206,000 extra troops in addition to the 550,000 already committed to Vietnam, a fact that hit the *New York Times* on March 10th, two days before the New Hampshire Democratic primary, which was assumed to be a formality for Johnson. There was an anti-war opponent but nobody took him seriously. He was the senator from Minnesota: a self-effacing, sardonically witty ex-college professor called Eugene McCarthy (who was no relation whatever to the 1950s Red-baiter, Joe).

Almost beneath the notice of the media, hundreds of students had travelled to New Hampshire to work for McCarthy. Those who looked over-hippyish, in the style of the time, were ordered to cut their hair and shave ("Clean for Gene") or confined to back-office duty. The rest took to the streets.

In mid-February polls showed McCarthy getting 20% of the vote. He got 42%. Four days later, on March 16th, Bobby Kennedy, brother of the martyred president, also entered the race as an anti-war candidate. That was the day—though no one in the United States would have then known it—when American troops killed hundreds of villagers at My Lai, a sign that the soldiery had become dehumanised to the point of barbarism. Two weeks later, on March 31st, Johnson stunned even his closest advisers by withdrawing from the election campaign and initiating peace talks. Five days after that, Martin Luther King was murdered in Memphis, causing a fresh outbreak of angry black rioting.

For young Americans, so privileged in many respects, the campaign against the war was not some theoretical cause, any more than the black demands for civil rights were. They were subject to conscription, and liable to be shipped out to Vietnam where their contemporaries were dying (at a rate of 300 a week in 1968, compared with nearly 4,000 in all so far in Iraq). It was easy enough to gain serial deferments (Bill Clinton, Dick Cheney) or a cushy number back home (George Bush junior) if you were smart enough or influential enough. But just about every American community now had someone who had been killed or maimed.

Elsewhere in the West the grievances were less obvious. Even the British government had the wit to keep its troops out of Vietnam, despite strong pressure from Johnson on the prime minister, Harold Wilson. But opposition to the war was global. And campus rebellion spread globally, sucking up local issues along the way—maybe only Maoist China, then more remote than the moon, marched to a totally different drummer.

It was partly imitative: there had been demos and sit-ins on American campuses in 1967—and American style, as ever, led the way. There were shared icons (notably Che Guevara, the guerrilla leader recently killed in Bolivia, and the largely unread sociologist Herbert Marcuse, author of the anti-capitalist tract "Repressive Tolerance") and a hotchpotch of grievances. A global investigation in the *Times* headed "Students in Revolt" highlighted "the war in Vietnam, racial discrimination, consensus politics and overstrained educational systems".

"The post-war economic boom had led to the phenomenal expansion of higher education all over the world," recalls Tariq Ali, then editor of the newspaper *Black Dwarf* and bête >

> noir of the British establishment. "Yet you still had pretty rigid sexual and social codes."

Sex was (naturally) a particularly strong catalyst in France: the unrest started at the bleak and overcrowded suburban campus at Nanterre, where protesters were particularly cross about stern rules concerning male visits to women's dormitories.

The often cited *casus belli* was a bizarre confrontation between a student, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and the Gaullist youth minister, François Missoffe, who had come to Nanterre to open a swimming pool. Cohn-Bendit complained that nowhere in the ministry's long report on youth was there a mention of sexual problems. "No wonder, with a face like yours, you have these problems: I suggest you take a dip in the pool."

Not since the French sent Henry V tennis balls and precipitated Agincourt has an insult caused more trouble. Within months Cohn-Bendit—red-haired, articulate and very cross—was "Dany the Red" and world-famous (and presumably not short of women). The crisis grew exponentially. The government scented a worldwide conspiracy. "It is not possible that all of these movements could be unleashed at the same time, in so many different countries, without orchestration," said de Gaulle. He over-estimated his enemy. The *Times* concluded that there was no conspiracy, merely mutual inspiration and a certain amount of cross-pollination. The mass communications of 1968 (no internet, no fax, a rudimentary international phone system) would seem primeval in 2008 but TV pictures via satellite meant that news travelled at a pace unknown even a decade earlier. It could now pierce the iron curtain. Though a student revolt in Poland was put down with police clubs, in Czechoslovakia the stars were momentarily in alignment: the youthful mood coincided with the arrival in power of the reform-minded Alexander Dubcek.

However, in a less globalised world than today, the local did tend to trump the generic. The Vietnam peace talks began in Paris at the height of the French disturbances: Edward Mortimer happened to mention this to one of the demonstrators. "Yes, yes," he replied distractedly. "But haven't you heard? There are barricades in Clermont-Ferrand!"

It is a little hard to equate Parisian kids' demands for easier sex with the carnage that had scarred Vietnam or communist repression, but there was a link. "Students in the West grew their hair long or whatever to show they weren't capitalists or warmongers like their parents," says historian and author Mary Heimann. "Students in Czechoslovakia grew their hair long and wore jeans to show they weren't rigid old-fashioned communists."

"There was something vague floating in the air at the time, like a tempest," recalls the philosopher Daniel Bensaïd, one of the student leaders at Nanterre. "It wasn't a plot, it wasn't a coincidence, it was a moment in history."

AND THEN IT passed. On May 30th de Gaulle re-appeared, made a dramatic radio address and called a parliamentary election. There was a sharp swing to the right. "It's the para-

January 5
Alexander Dubcek, a reformer, elected as first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party

January 30
Viet Cong launch surprise attacks all over South Vietnam during *Tet* (New Year) celebrations

February 8
Charlton Heston steals a simian smooch in "Planet of the Apes"

February 20
Beatles meet in Rishikesh in India to meditate with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

February 24
US and South Vietnamese recapture the old imperial city of Hue

March 12
Eugene McCarthy, a little-known anti-war senator, almost beats President Lyndon Johnson in New Hampshire Democratic primary

March 16
US troops commit My Lai massacre
Robert Kennedy, brother of JFK, joins Democratic race on anti-war ticket

March 20
Six students arrested at anti-war demonstration in Nanterre, sparking protests across France

March 31
Johnson announces that he will not run for re-election

April 2
Bombs wreck two Frankfurt department stores. Andreas Baader and three others later convicted

dox of '68," muses Bensaïd now, "the biggest revolt, the biggest rightist majority."

Perhaps it wasn't such a paradox. On the streets of Paris, it was often exhilarating. And despite the massive numbers, only a handful were killed in the whole insurrection. That's not how it looked on the TV screens of *la France profonde*: voters took fright.

As soon as France went quiet, Bobby Kennedy was shot dead by a lone Palestinian gunman, Sirhan Sirhan, moments after delivering an eloquent victory speech in the California primary. There was shock but not surprise. "They shot him," people were heard to cry in the confused aftermath. In the atmosphere of the time, no one had to ask who "they" were: "they" constituted the sinister forces of established authority out to get anyone who threatened their power. With JFK shot, and MLK, and now Bobby, it looked as though any challenger was a target: "They are going to kill off all our leaders," said one activist. No matter that Sirhan was an embittered Palestinian, and Bobby was American royalty. "They" had prevailed.

Kennedy's murder ensured that "they" would provide the next American president: either the vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, or the former vice-president, Richard Nixon. The brief shining moment of McCarthy's New Hampshire triumph had been subsumed in the bloody civil war for the soul of the left between his supporters and Bobby's.

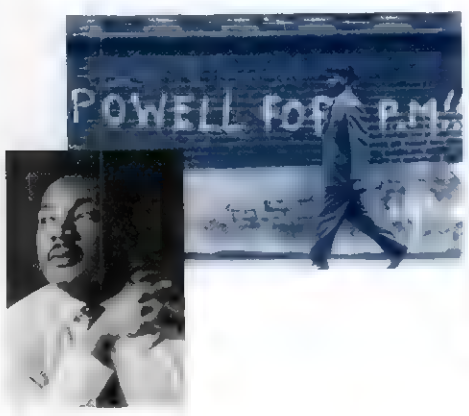
That rancour did not die until McCarthy did, aged 89, in 2005. I interviewed him in 2003, when he was in a Washington old people's home, and largely forgotten; what shone through was his enduring wit (I found him reading "Lord of the Flies": "It's about the Bush administration, you know," he said)—and his bitterness about the Kennedys.

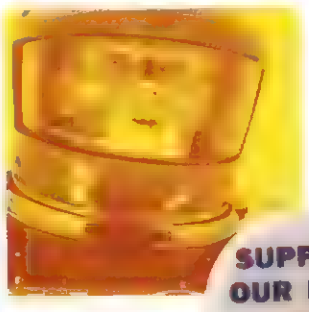
His campaign had always had a strange disengaged quality: Jeremy Larner, McCarthy's speechwriter, said he never once heard him discuss what he might do as president. And that grew more pronounced. "Bobby's assassination killed Gene too in a way," Larner recalls, "He really didn't want to campaign at all after Bobby was shot."

Under the rules in place at the time (abolished for 1972), it was possible to win the nomination without taking a single primary by stitching up the party machine, which Humphrey was doing. Larner argues, convincingly, that Kennedy's charisma and money could have bust this wide open. Without him, there was no chance. The Chicago convention was a farce and, on the streets where police were beating protesters, a bloody disgrace.

That same week, the Soviet Union moved its tanks into Prague and asserted control over the government. "Socialism with a human face" was over then and for ever. Moscow believed that Dubcek was incapable of controlling the forces that had been unleashed, and that the country might tilt towards the West. Moscow was right. Communist control of eastern Europe was halfway through its baleful reign. No one again believed it could be made compatible with liberty. The Vietnam peace talks stalled—many believe they were sabotaged by an alliance between President Thieu of South Vietnam and American presidential aspirant Nixon. For both, success in Paris would have been a disaster.

And so, gradually, the Earth resumed its former orbit. Perhaps it hadn't really been away. Britain was only a bit >





April 4
Martin Luther King shot dead in Memphis. Riots across the US

April 5
Czechoslovak leaders promise free speech, movement and association

April 20
Enoch Powell a Conservative frontbench MP, delivers "Rivers of Blood" speech about immigration to Britain

April 23-30
Columbia University n New York is taken over and shut down by student protesters

April 24
Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" tops British charts until May 22

May 6-7
Street fighting erupts in Paris

May 9
Soviet Union moves troops to Czechoslovakia's borders

May 10
British premiere of "2001 A Space Odyssey'

May 13
Vietnam peace talks beg n in Paris

May 21
General strike across France

May 30
President de Gaulle makes dramatic radio broadcast and calls election

June 3
Andy Warhol shot and wounded by Valerie Solanas, a feminist writer

GO BEYOND SIGHT AS YOU KNOW IT.

GO BEYOND SOUND AS YOU'VE EVER

IMAGINED IT COULD BE. WHERE WHAT YOU

WATCH BYPASSES YOUR REGULAR

SENSES COMPLETELY AND GOES RIGHT TO

YOUR BRAIN. WHERE COLOURS CAN BE

FELT, SOUNDS CAN BE TASTED AND IT

ALL COMES TOGETHER TO CREATE

SOMETHING TRULY UNIQUE

INTRODUCING THE KURO

EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF AT

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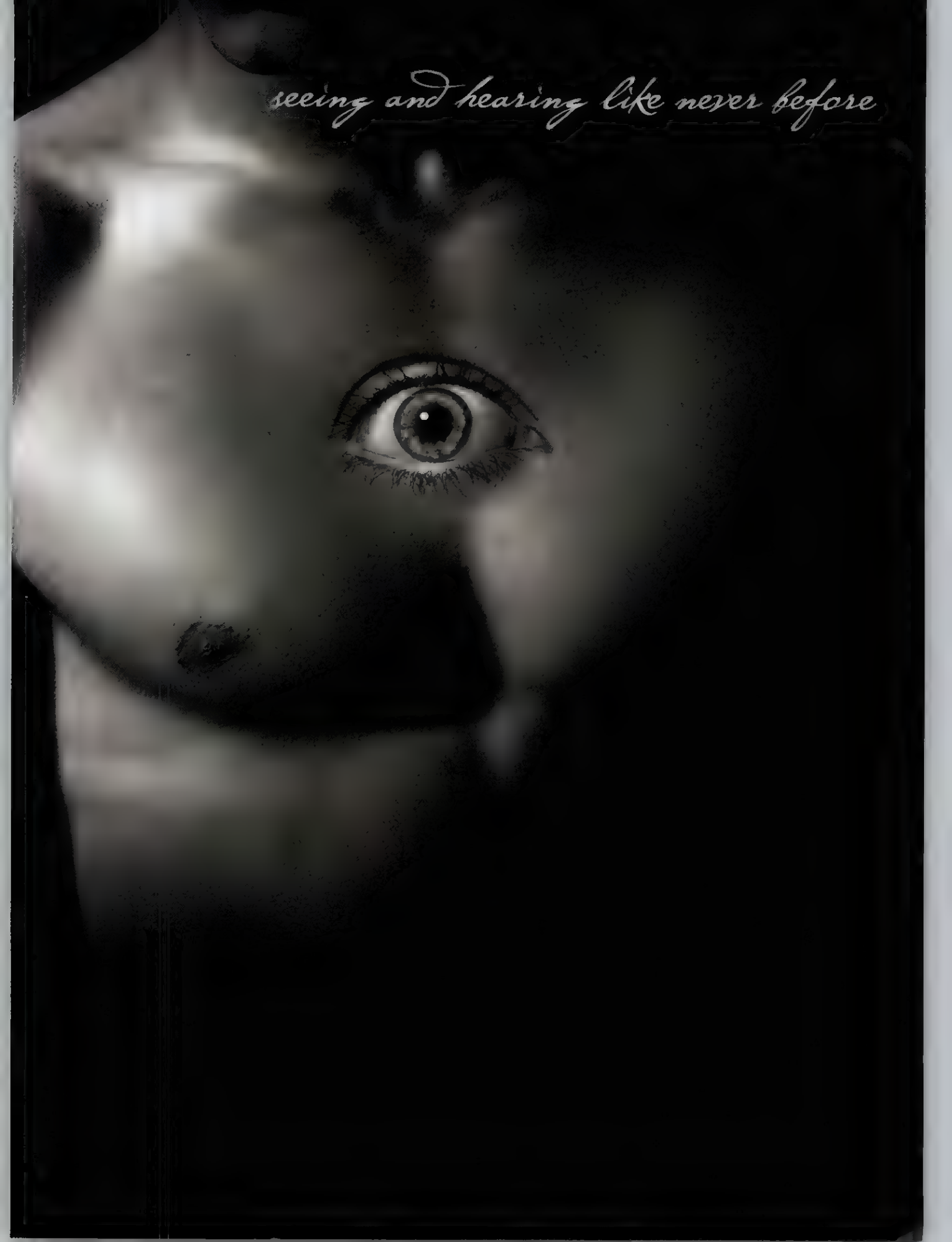
seeing and hearing like never before


seeing and hearing like never before

> player in the political upheavals, but culturally it had never been more influential: foreigners, anyway, believed its capital was "Swinging London". The most durable number-one single of 1968 in Britain (in an era when teenagers bought 45rpm vinyl discs as frequently as they bought cigarettes) was "Those Were The Days" by the twee Welsh chanteuse, Mary Hopkin.

The leaders of rock culture kept pushing the boundaries of music, drug use and onstage outrage. In 1968 the Who were best known for destroying their instruments; but they were quietly working on the rock opera "Tommy". The Beatles were no longer cuddly moptops, and most of their headlines were bad ones. But "Sergeant Pepper" was still number-one album at the start of the year (vying with "The Sound of Music"), and the White Album came in with the lunarnauts. But the new had not displaced the old at all. Dominic Sandbrook ends his history of 1960s Britain, "White Heat", with a dissertation on the TV comedy hit of 1968, the wartime wallow "Dad's Army", and notes: "Although the Sixties is often seen as a period of Utopian optimism, the culture of the time, from the albums of the Beatles and the Kinks to the poems of Philip Larkin and the novels of John Fowles, was suffused with a powerful sense of nostalgia."

These disjunctions spread into politics. Bill (now Lord) Rodgers, one of the last 1968 government ministers still alive, confirms that Wilson was far more worried about a right-wing Labour plot to install the chancellor, Roy Jenkins, in his place than he ever was about student revolution. The major British political event of the year was the anti-immigrant "Rivers of Blood" speech by the Tory politician Enoch Powell. Polls showed that Powell, unanimously condemned at the court of elite opinion, had overwhelming public support. All year, there were massive swings to the Conservative opposition in by-elections, suggesting nostalgia even extended to the rule of Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

This was not just a British phenomenon. There was also the French election, and Nixon's capture of the American presidency. Indeed, research suggested that many of those who had voted for McCarthy in the New Hampshire primary later voted not for Humphrey, nor for Nixon, but the overtly racist third-party candidate, George Wallace.

In 1969 Britain gave 18- to 21-year-olds the vote as a sop to generational demand; when the nation indeed returned the Tories at the 1970 election, the new voters marched in step with their elders. On campuses, the protests became more muted, and all the echoes with them. By the early 1970s, Western assumptions of endless prosperity began to look more questionable—the next generation of students would have sterner priorities. The tumult and the shouting died away. So what did it all achieve? What happened to it all?

"WHAT HAPPENED TO IT ALL? WHAT HAPPENED TO IT ALL?" Felix Dennis was roaring now. "We changed the fucking world, that's what, you scumbag."

Dennis, connected with the radical magazine *Oz* in 1968 and later a publishing tycoon in his own very capital- >

June 5 Bobby Kennedy fatally shot

June 19 Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash" is British number one

June 30 Huge election victory for de Gaulle

July 17 Premiere of Beatles' "Yellow Submarine"

July 25 Pope Paul VI condemns artificial birth control

August 1 "Friendly bilateral talks" between Dubcek and the Russian leader, Leonid Breznnev, end without agreement

August 20 Soviet tanks roll into Prague. Dubcek is arrested

August 29 Vice-President Hubert Humphrey nominated as Democratic presidential candidate amid riots in Chicago

September 11 Beatles' "Hey Jude" tops British charts

September 26 British theatre censorship abolished "Oliver!" premieres in Britain

September 27 Cast of "Hair" stands naked on the London stage

October 2 Dozens of protesters killed by Mexican security forces ten days before opening of Olympics

ist right, grew a little more respectful once he discovered I was old enough to have my own memories of the year. He remained pretty vehement.

The world did change. But who changed it? It depends on what you mean by "we". Stuck that year in a boarding school in the English countryside, I didn't change much, though I think we successfully agitated for a liberalisation of the rules on leaving the premises.

And out in the big wide world the great legislative reforms of the 1960s came not from the young agitators but the older generation: it was the reviled Johnson who pushed civil rights legislation through a still-reluctant Congress. Anti-homosexuality laws started being repealed across America from 1962; Britain followed five years later.

What didn't change at first was attitude. Casual racism had certainly not disappeared. And the old cultural taboos against homosexuals remained in place: there were no openly gay mainstream pop stars until the late 1970s and, outside the still secretive subculture, the word "gay" continued to mean blithely happy.

Furthermore, the causes—more coherent and achievable than "revolution"—that would eventually flow from the 1960s had not yet shown themselves. The term "women's lib" gained common currency only in 1970, and even then was used by most men with a wry smile. Paul Ehrlich's jeremiad "The Population Bomb" was published in 1968, but environmentalism also did not become fashionable until the next decade before fading again, along with Ehrlich's predictions.

Yet Dennis is not wrong. You can see 1968 as the hinge on which the post-war world hangs; and the screw in that hinge was the screwing. "What everyone forgets is that the pill had just arrived," says Dennis. "There was no AIDS, no herpes. Syphilis was in absolute retreat and even gonorrhea was very rare. You might get a dose of the crabs. There was free sex with no downside. It was a very small window and it lasted about seven years.

"And women were walking down the street in miniskirts, in what looked like their underwear. It was almost too much for anyone to stand."

Even so, the sexual implications of the fashion were still publicly discussed only in code. British reticence, American Puritanism, Continental religiosity and Communist repression saw to that. The change towards open discussion developed only very slowly.

The same applies to related social developments: in 1968 most young men still wore pyjamas and white Y-fronts, even if they were now readier to take them off; casual drug use slipped only slowly from the avant-garde to the high-school playground; and very long hair for men did not become the norm until the 1970s (all the really serious student revolutionaries I knew in that era kept their hair determinedly short). Social change was far slower than history or selective memory might suggest. But 1968 made it unstoppable.

"In the end, it was a sensational victory," says Felix Dennis, "the hidden victory that set up the 21st century. And on that, the whole Western world floats as it does."

■

October 5
Beginning of Ulster troubles violent battles on streets of Derry

October 17
Black power protest at Olympics

October 25
Release of Jimi Hendrix's "Electric Ladyland"

October 27
Some 250,000 anti-war protesters march on US embassy in London

October 31
Johnson orders end to bombing of North Vietnam

November 5
Richard Nixon elected president

November 14
Yale University dec des to go co-ed

November 22
The Beatles release "The Beatles", better known as the White Album

November 29
'Unhnished Music No.1 Two Virgins" released by John Lennon and Yoko Ono—beginning of the end for Beatles

December 3
NBC broadcasts Elvis's comeback special—taped in June

December 19
Lindsay Anderson's film "If. . . ", about a revolution at an English public school, has its premiere in London

December 24
Apollo 8 orbits the moon The crew become the first to see Earth as a planet

2
?

HOW CLEVER ARE WE?

OUR IQS ARE RISING AT AN ASTONISHING RATE. ONE MAN HAS SPENT 20 YEARS WORKING OUT WHY. HELEN JOYCE TALKS TO THE DISCOVERER OF THE FLYNN EFFECT

JAMES FLYNN IS not the sort of man to go quietly into retirement. At the age of 73, the professor emeritus at the University of Otago in New Zealand teaches and researches as energetically as ever. He is active in politics, speaking on finance and tax for the left-of-centre Alliance Party. One book, still in the writing, will be his final word on the relation between race and IQ. And this autumn he embarked on a world lecture tour to talk about another book, which sets out his explanation for the mysterious phenomenon that bears his name—that your IQ is far higher than your parents', and your children's IQs will be far higher than yours.

"Our advantage over our ancestors is relatively uniform at all ages from the cradle to the grave," says Flynn. Nobody knows if the gains will persist, but "there is no doubt that they dominated the 20th century and that their existence and size were quite unexpected." Flynn, bearded and with a shock of curly hair, speaks as he writes, with lengthy threads of meaning weaving together his sentences.

He is not afraid to offend. In July, when a journalist asked him about New Zealand census figures showing that less-educated women bear more children, he said the trend would exert downward pressure on average intelligence, just as average heights would fall if short people had more children than taller ones. Flynn went on to speculate that if future scientific advances meant contraceptives could be put in the water, so that an antidote had to be taken before becoming pregnant, then every child would be a wanted child. Another academic described his ideas as "totally repugnant"; New Zealand's children's commissioner said he was wandering into "dangerous territory". And Flynn? He said he was just too old to be worrying about offending anyone.

Which makes Flynn's ideas on intelligence, race and politics all the more striking for their liberalism. They had their genesis in his time at the University of Chicago half a century ago. In 1951, aged 17, he had travelled to the Midwest from his home town of Washington, DC, to study politics. Liberal ideas were in the air—nine years earlier, some >

ILLUSTRATION BY DETTMER OTTO

> of the university's students had helped found the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Precociously clever, Flynn was awarded a BA after just one year, and went on to do a master's degree and then a doctorate. In his first academic job, at the University of Eastern Kentucky, he became chairman of a chapter of CORE—and as a result found his job untenable. He moved north, to Lake Forest, a liberal-arts college back in Chicago, only to find that his socialist politics meant he didn't fit in there either.

So in 1963 he moved to New Zealand, taking his interest in liberal ideas with him. And in 1980 he wrote a book, "Race, IQ and Jensen", arguing that the reason American blacks' IQs lagged behind those of their white compatriots was not genetic inferiority, as claimed by some intelligence researchers (including Jensen). The gap was caused, Flynn thought, by the huge differences between the two groups' environments. Hence it could be closed. He discussed how, between the two great wars, blacks had narrowed the gap with whites on tests of mental ability that the American military used to screen recruits. His opponents had retorted that such tests merely registered school-taught knowledge, and that the gap would remain unchanged on any purer test of cognitive ability. To prove them wrong, Flynn needed to show that the military tests truly measured intelligence, and not just learning.

So he started wading through the manuals for the two most widely used IQ tests to see how well they correlated with the ones the military used. Both the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler tests were seen as good measures of native intelligence, so if the same people tended to do well on both the IQ tests and the military ones, it would strengthen his case that there had been cognitive gains among black Americans.

Flynn found nothing relevant to his search, but he did spot something else, something very strange. IQ tests are updated periodically, to replace out-of-date questions ("typewriters" have given way to "computers"; dated words like "delectable" have been jettisoned for modern jargon like "operational"). Whenever a test was updated, a single group of people would take both versions—the obsolete and the replacement—to check that each ranked people in a similar order. As a matter of completeness, the groups' average scores on both versions would be published in the test manuals. And pretty much always, the group would score higher on the old test. An IQ score shows how a candidate does in comparison with a large "standardisation sample" of people who took the test when it was first introduced. Flynn's discovery indicated that the people who were used to calibrate the earlier tests were consistently easier for test-takers to beat.

Now Flynn found himself with a much bolder hypothesis. Rather than just one disadvantaged group—black Americans—having made cognitive gains, could the average person be getting smarter? He looked up every study in which a single group had been given two tests, one calibrated before the other. By 1984 he had compiled results from more than 7,000 subjects, and about a dozen combinations of tests. And they pointed to a startling conclusion: that white Americans had been steadily gaining around three-tenths of an IQ point a year for almost half a century.

In 1984 he published a paper saying so. It didn't convince his critics. As far as they were concerned, all he had proved was that IQ tests were far more influenced by general improvements in schooling, and far less good at picking up native ability, than had previously been thought. IQ scores tend to remain fairly stable throughout a person's adult life, and studies of twins who had been separated at birth suggested that genetic inheritance had a greater influence on IQ than anything environmental did. That Americans—white Americans, no less—could genuinely be getting smarter, and doing so astonishingly quickly, seemed inconceivable.

THE AVERAGE IQ IN 1900 WOULD BE 70 TODAY. THAT IS THE CUT-OFF FOR MENTAL RETARDATION

So Flynn looked farther afield. "I had got some notoriety because of my '84 article," he explains. "So I felt I could write the military authorities in every country that gave mental tests, and all the testing agencies around the world that I knew of." Not all of them answered, but some did. And it was the reply he got on a dull November Saturday in 1984, from P.A. Vroon, a Dutch psychologist, that convinced Flynn he was on to something of profound significance.

It contained the results, from 1952 to 1982, of 18-year-old Dutch conscripts on a test called Raven's Progressive Matrices. This is one of the purest tests of innate intelligence. The task is to spot logical patterns in groups of shapes and fill in the missing ones (see box). There are no words, no school-taught skills and no general knowledge. In those three decades the average score had gone up by 20 points.

This was a huge gain: it meant that an 18-year-old with a middling score in 1982 had done better than all but a tenth of the young men of the same age who had been tested three decades earlier. Just as tellingly, a random sample of the most recent group had been matched with their own fathers, and the sons had scored 18 points higher. Over the following year

Flynn received data from another 13 countries, all of them showing IQ gains.

Today, no doubt remains: IQs have gone up throughout the 20th century. Almost 30 countries, some developed, some developing, have recorded gains. The whole world, it seemed, had got smarter, faster than had ever been thought possible. But no one knew how, or why, or what this meant.

PARADOXES ABOUNDED. "Why are we not struck by the extraordinary subtlety of our children's conversation?" asks Flynn. "Why do we not have to make allowances for the limitations of our parents?"

If you project IQ gains back to 1900, the average score would be less than 70 on current norms. "That's the cut-off for a diagnosis of mental retardation," says Flynn. If people in 1900 were as thick-skulled as that, how on earth did they manage to run a modern society?

Then there was the puzzle of how such massive gains could have occurred at all. Everything that was known about IQ suggested that by far the strongest influence on it was genetic: parents and their children tend to have similar IQs; the IQs of identical twins are closer than those of fraternal twins; and the effects on IQ of environmental factors such as better schooling tend to fade. "And yet, IQ gains are so great as to signal the existence of environmental factors of enormous potency." How could environment be so feeble and so potent at the same time?

For two decades, Flynn thought about these questions, in between teaching and carrying out research in politics and moral philosophy. Many others thought about them too. Some rejected the very notion of IQ. It had always been controversial anyway, from its early links with eugenics to its later use to justify the place of white men at the top of pretty much every hierarchy. If IQ was meaningless, then its increase would be meaningless too.

But Flynn was sure that rising IQs did matter. IQ is a pretty good predictor of academic success. Scores on IQ tests tend to match teachers' opinions of their students. People with low IQs are rarely found in jobs that require creativity or autonomy. Although plenty of other ingredients are needed for success in life, an above-average IQ seems to help.

TEST YOURSELF

A question you could find in Raven's Progressive Matrices test

Among those who took rising IQs seriously, some thought the cause might be better diet, or smaller families, or more liberal child-rearing. But none of these theories accounted for the size or extent of the phenomenon. And none could explain the odd pattern of the gains.

Most IQ tests contain a collection of subtests, each of which picks up on a different mental skill. And only some of the subtests showed an increase in scores. The average person had become much better at completing geometric patterns, at spotting abstract similarities and at re-ordering scrambled picture cards to tell a story. But people were no better at memorising lists of numbers, and their vocabulary and general knowledge had not expanded at all.

Why would better-fed children, or those with fewer siblings, or those who were more gently reared, grow into adults who had improved so much on some intellectual tasks, but not on others? The rise in IQs was a mass phenomenon, but by no means all children were better-fed.

Although the components of an IQ test measure different skills, someone who is good at one tends to be good at the others too. The same people who are good at spotting the missing piece of a pattern tend also to be good at arithmetic and to amass large vocabularies and stores of general knowledge. This common element, known as "*g*" for "general intelligence factor", is what IQ tests are meant to measure.

Some subtests are better single measures of the overall score than others. This is not surprising: you could imagine testing people on their ability to cook different dishes. Those who cooked one dish beautifully would be most likely to cook other ones well too, so there would be a "general cooking factor", but the truly excellent cooks would open up a bigger lead when making soufflé than when frying an egg. Likewise, the most cognitively complex tasks are better predictors of *g* than more straightforward ones—but some of the most complex tasks showed very large gains, and others, none at all. If each of a pair of tests was supposed to be equally closely related to innate intelligence, how could people have got so much better at one of them but not the other? >

It was this puzzling patchiness that started Flynn thinking along the right lines. He likes to use sporting analogies to illustrate his ideas. Suppose we had long been in the habit of subjecting children to a battery of tests for athleticism—long jump, high jump, sprint, and so on. As with mental abilities, so physical abilities would tend to be linked: someone who can run fast can usually also run a long way, and jump high and far. So we could calculate a "physical *g*".

But over time priorities change. Satellite television becomes widespread; broadcasters bid up the rights to athletic events; advertisers find that some events attract viewers so they pay more for those events and sponsor the athletes who excel at them. The 100-metre sprint, say, becomes the most popular event in schools and sports clubs; training improves. Even though human bodies and human genes have not changed, and even though excellence in sprinting is still just as closely related as it ever was to excellence in other events, sprinting improves massively, whereas performance in other events barely changes.

WHEN ONE PERSON THINKS SOMETHING WORTHWHILE, WE CAN ALL THINK IT. THAT CHANGES ALL OF US

By reverse-engineering the pattern of improvement in IQ tests, you can tell how mental priorities have changed over the century. It turns out that we, far more than our recent ancestors, take seriously the ability to find abstract similarities between objects (Question: how are dogs and rabbits alike? Answer: they are both mammals). And we are better at applying logic to finding abstract patterns, as in Raven's Progressive Matrices.

"At that point I began to get excited", says Flynn, "because I began to feel that I was bridging the gulf between our minds and the minds of our ancestors. We weren't more intelligent than they, but we had learnt to apply our intelligence to a new set of problems. We had detached logic from the concrete, we were willing to deal with the hypothetical, and we thought the world was a place to be classified and understood scientifically rather than to be manipulated."

Flynn cites his own father, who was 50 when he was born in 1934. "He was a highly intelligent man. But he had only an intermediate school education; he and all his brothers had gone into factory work between the ages of 12 and 14. I don't think he would have taken a 'matrices' problem seriously. He wouldn't have had any practice in his everyday life at finding logical patterns in abstract shapes; he could do logic all right, but it was mainly applied to concrete situations."

Saying that the rise in IQ scores is caused by shifting social priorities may seem like dismissing it as mildly interesting, but ultimately trivial. This would be to miss the point. Changes in what we take seriously, and what we use our minds for, are just as real and meaningful as changes in the speed with which we process thoughts, or how much we can remember.

"I reject the idea that either these are intelligence gains or else they're insignificant," says Flynn. "They're not in any simple sense intelligence gains, but they are still highly significant." His father was also rather unwilling to waste his time on profitless speculation. "I remember frustrating occasions when it was natural for me to take hypothetical situations seriously and he thought of this as silly. We might argue about race, and I would say: 'What would you think if your skin turned black?' And his response would be: 'Who has ever heard of such a thing?' Most moral argument cannot get off the ground unless you take the hypothetical seriously."

And when he looks at his two-year-old grandson, he sees social priorities shifting still further. "His parents have enlisted in the great crusade of intellectual stimulation. If he identifies something they immediately pounce on it. A parent 30 years ago who was looking at a book with their child, if the child said, 'that's a cow'; they would say, 'you're right, it's a cow.' Today's parent will add, 'And what noise does a cow make? How many legs does a cow have?' And away they go."

I tell him that this story makes me think of my own 18-month-old son, who, when I took him to his room the night before our conversation, had turned the light switch on and off, again and again, until finally, to his disgust, I had pulled him away to put him in his cot. "Exactly! Merely being surrounded by mechanical contrivances prepares you to have a different mindset. They are artificial causal networks. That in itself helps to free the mind."

DIY IQ

Social shifts unleash powerful environmental forces that have raised IQ. Although one person cannot remake society, if he can remake his own environment he may transcend the cards he was dealt at birth and become smarter

Flynn has demonstrated that Asian-Americans have managed consistently to outperform their native abilities. The pervasive myth that the group is innately cleverer than average is just that—originating with a study that used out-of-date tests and so scored Chinese-Americans against the wrong norms. Although Chinese-Americans have the same average IQs as other Americans, they do better at high school, apply to, and get into, more prestigious universities, study for professional and postgraduate qualifications, work harder and longer. That is why they end up performing like a group with an average IQ almost 20 points higher than its real one.

The secret is demanding, but simple enough consume ideas, work hard and demand a lot of yourself. Then you will carry around your own mental gymnasium wherever you go.

TEST ANSWER

THERE IS STILL the puzzle of how environmental differences can be so weak when we compare individuals born at the same time, but so strong over time. The key, which Flynn attributes to fruitful discussions with his collaborator, William Dickens, an economist at the Brookings Institution in Flynn's home town of Washington, DC, lies in the observation that superior genes cause superior performance by co-opting superior environments.

To illustrate, he recounts another sporting analogy; this time—as is practically mandatory in all discussion of the roles of genes and environment—a fable about identical twins, separated at birth.

These particular twins were born in Indiana, and adopted by unconnected families in the vicinity. They share genes that make them grow a bit taller and stronger than average. In that basketball-mad state, both, like all neighbouring children, shoot hoops in the yard and in school, and, being tall and strong, they are both rather good. This is pleasurable, so they play more and get better still. Each makes his high-school team, enjoys good coaching, puts in a great deal of practice, and goes on to play for his college team too. Both men started with a slight shared genetic advantage. But even tall, strong players are bad before they are trained and it was their genes' ability to recruit an ideal environment that explains how this translated into an enormous superiority.

Everything falls into place with the observation that, for the first time in human history, some people's superior mental abilities are making superior mental environments available to everyone. Humans are social animals. The most important part of the environment that created your mind is other people's minds. Before the 20th century, only the privileged had easy access to ideas. Now, when one person thinks something worthwhile, we can all think it and that thought changes all of us.

This process does not have to be "intellectual" to have an effect. In his book "Everything Bad is Good for You", Steven Johnson analyses the way popular entertainment has changed as people have got better at using their brains quickly and logically. Computer games such as "Civilization" and "The Sims" reward players who obey the coherent internal logic of virtual realities. Popular television shows weave together multiple characters and storylines, in narrative arcs that extend over many episodes. Think of "24", or "Heroes", which require the audience to hold unanswered questions in their minds through entire series.

These days, film and television viewers are expected to work more out for themselves. Baddies no longer wear black hats; plucky kids lost in the wood no longer turn to one another and say "let's split up"; the presence of an intruder is no longer signalled by repeated shots of a door left ajar.

THE FLYNN EFFECT is not a story of pure gains. There are signs that children are missing concrete experiences that help develop some mental abilities. Michael Shayer, a psychologist at King's College London, has spent most of his working life studying the foundations of mathematical ability. In 1976 he tested children on their understanding of volume and shape—an understanding thought by many to underlie all future mathematical ability. When he repeated the tests in 2003, 11-year-olds performed only as well as eight-year-olds had 30 years earlier.

Flynn does, though, provide a dignified escape from fruitless arguments about nature and nurture. And it points towards a satisfying answer to his original question: why do black Americans still perform worse on IQ tests than whites do, even when matched for poverty and other disadvantages? It is perfectly possible that blackness itself in a still-biased society means their genes can only co-opt inferior environments.

And most importantly, it shows that whole societies can get better at thinking. The next step will be to build on IQ gains to become wiser too. Flynn reels off abstractions that are now part of our intellectual capital: concepts such as "market", "placebo" and "control group". "If only we trained students to use these properly, that would...give them more critical intelligence and allow them to test truth in the world around them." The mind is supple and the Flynn effect shows that what we value gets stronger.

■

China choking

Coal powers China's furious transformation. But the human cost is high.

Photo essay by MIKE GOLDWATER

"ENERGY MADE OUR civilisation what it is, yet it is also what threatens our survival," says Mike Goldwater. "I had been to China a few times and seen the amount of pollution produced by coal and industry." Goldwater, a photo-journalist working on a book on energy, spent a month there this summer recording the soot and grime and choking dust of China's northern coalfields. "I was overwhelmed by the scale of the problem."

China's dilemma: poverty or pollution. Hundreds of millions of rural Chinese need energy-hungry growth to escape destitution. And yet by the end of 2007, says the International Energy Agency, China will have overtaken America to become the planet's biggest source of greenhouse gases.

Half of all manufactured goods come from China. Construction is ubiquitous. Factories, offices and high-rise new towns are built to low specifications and so are environmentally costly to run. "We are exporting our carbon footprint to China by importing goods produced under these conditions."

Last year alone, China built enough power stations to supply France—and most of them burn coal. The country has struggled to find oil and gas, but coal is so abundant in northern China and Inner Mongolia, that "you stick a pin in a map and the chances are you'll find some."

Mining extracts a heavy toll. Some quarter of a million people have died in Chinese mines since the Communists took control in 1949. Although the death rate has slowed, the country's illegal private coalmines are still highly dangerous.

Local people are "resilient and stoic", Goldwater says. "Everyone is struggling in their own way to survive." But they suffer the blight of blackened countryside and choking air. Lung diseases are common. "The landscape in the areas most severely hit is being destroyed. The Wudu coalfield in Inner Mongolia is the most extreme." Farther afield, acid rain is falling on Seoul and Tokyo. All the while, the planet is being blanketed in carbon dioxide.

Government efforts to do something are only partly heeded. Local officials know that the environment is a mess, but they also know that their authority depends on providing economic growth. So they pretend. Goldwater tells of a coal conference at which officials put up large, 15-foot-high corrugated blue barriers to hide the pollution. When he turned up with his cameras, he remembers, officials rebuffed him: "They tell you to go and photograph the Great Wall of China instead."

■

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY IMAGES

A miner with mule and cart at an illegal private mine in the Wuda field, Inner Mongolia

A coal truck crosses dirt roads in the Wuda field, Inner Mongolia
A conveyor-belt operator at the state-owned Ximing mine in Taiyuan, Shanxi province

A worker at a small private mine in Datong, Shanxi province
Miners at the state-owned Ximing mine in Taiyuan start their shift

An illegal private mine in the Wuda field, Inner Mongolia
A driver levels the load at a private mine in Datong, Shanxi province

金刚
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Young coal workers at Niujiagou valley in Taiyuan, Shanxi province

Two miners walk home in the Wuda field, Inner Mongolia
Xia Shi, a beggar, lost an arm at the coal works near Jiexu, Shanxi province

They're well-qualified, well-off and working long hours. MIRANDA GREEN meets the stay-at-home fathers who are gradually reinventing family life

A SUNNY MORNING in the affluent London suburb of Wimbledon, and the atmosphere in the playgroup is jolly, but a good deal quieter than you would expect with 13 children and 12 adults milling around a church hall. The reason isn't hard to spot: the parents are all men, and there is a certain masculine reserve in the air. Welcome to Dads and Little'Uns.

Chatting over coffee and an impressive array of biscuits, the ten or so fathers maintain a low hum of conversation, breaking off every so often to rescue a toddler from underneath a fallen toy or to redirect an off-target crawl. The men bring their children here every Monday and Friday, all year round (£4 a week into the kitty to cover costs). Theirs appears to be the first and perhaps only regular group for stay-at-home fathers in London. They are part of a growing trend for husbands to move onto traditional female territory, taking care of home and children while their high-powered other half is out hunting and gathering.

Most of the fathers are in their 30s. There's a lot of baggy denim and fashionable facial hair and a bit of joshing about the latest sports results. The playgroup has spawned other, reassuringly male activities—a weekly football game, beer and poker nights, and day trips to an outward-bound centre in the forest. "All very macho," jokes Matt Lowe, playgroup co-ordinator, former advertising account-manager and now full-time father to two young daughters.

The most noticeable thing is how healthy and happy the fathers look. They keep calling themselves "lucky"—lucky to be playing a big part in their children's crucial early years, and lucky to be able to afford it. But there are complications and consequences for the parents who defy convention in this way. And although couples willing to talk about their role-reversal tend to accentuate the positive, internet chatrooms and fathers' networks give glimpses of the stresses of becoming a house-husband.

The Wimbledon playgroup started about five years ago as a get-together, almost a refuge, for men who had felt unwelcome at the standard woman-and-toddler meetings. As Matt describes it: "There were stories about the room going quiet, staring, the mothers on one side and the nannies on the other, neither wanting to speak to the father." Matt doesn't feel comfortable at his daughters' swimming lessons, surrounded by women in swimsuits. Another father says he has been on the receiving end of suspicion from husbands who find him chatting to the mothers in Starbucks. >

Him indoors

WIMBLEDON DADS GROUP
LONDON OCTOBER 2007

Peter Baylies, a former news photographer from Massachusetts, launched AtHomeDad.com, a website and newsletter, in the early 1990s (slogan: "men who change diapers change the world"). He remembers feeling outnumbered and intimidated when he was pushing the pram, aware of a "Mr Mom" stigma: "I knew the dads were out there, but pretty much hiding in their homes."

Tensions can also arise between a couple. Psychologists say the men can become timid and even experience sexual problems, whereas some of the women miss time at home with their children, particularly the very young ones. Baylies suggests that conflict is often caused by confusion about who does what—and by an unwillingness on the part of the woman to give up female territory. "It is difficult for the man at the beginning—you are on her turf." The experiment works, he says, in "families where the wife is level-headed and logical and says 'OK, you do it'." Trouble between Peter and his wife in those early months arose from their different definitions of cleanliness—nothing, it seems, except domestic staff can spare couples from arguments about the state of the toilet. For a while, Peter simply refused to clean it: "Yes, I was that male chauvinist pig saying 'why should I clean the bathroom?' It didn't bother me but it did bother her."

Baylies advises couples to write out a schedule of responsibilities, and says there are ways to avoid tussles during that difficult hour when the working partner re-enters the domestic sphere. "I would light a candle in the evening and turn off the lights, so she couldn't see the mess. You know, there's a bowl of fruit and I'm reading to them."

A post on AtHomeDad.com suggests that working women will give more sex to men who have the house clean and dinner ready when they get home—a strange, refracted version of the advice in women's magazines from decades ago. And many of the men now immersing themselves in the world of nappies and parent-teacher associations understand more about the lives of women who stay at home, especially if they have given up the ego-buffer of a good job.

The Wimbledon fathers resist any suggestion that they have lost status—though the very question brings a brief pallor to their cheeks. Only one man I meet later admits to feeling "emasculated, if that's the word" and he's a writer, given, perhaps, to deeper self-examination than the others. But they will all talk about adjusting to a life devoted to others' needs, a shift that women have long made. Paul, a former video editor, dapper in his Fred Perry shirt, reflects: "At first you don't think about that, but there is the stereotype of the discontented stay-at-home mum, and I can see now why women get so frustrated. You don't always get the rewards, other than the obvious ones of seeing your children grow up and being with them all the time…And there's the repetitiveness—that you have to get used to. You're not going to get much back."

Matt has noticed that at dinner parties he now feels unable to join in male conversation about work. He often feels he is operating "in a vacuum. At work you become used to having an appraisal and feedback," he observes. Not so at home. And there is the identity question: "A lot of people are defined by their employment, it provides you with a label… and now the label you've got is an unusual one that most men can't identify with."

THE OVERWHELMING TREND is for families to juggle the demands of two jobs, even if one is part-time. In Britain the Office for National Statistics found in 2004 that the mother is the sole earner among only 3% of married or cohabiting couples with children. Just under 139,000 married or cohabiting men gave looking after family or home as their reason for economic inactivity. America's Bureau of Labour Statistics found that a mere 5% of fathers stayed at home while their partners worked. Earlier American surveys estimated

that only 147,000 fathers were married or cohabiting with no outside earnings.

But the figures probably underestimate the importance of stay-at-home fathers. In Britain they count those caring for parents or other relatives—but not part-time workers (and at least 15% of working fathers in the survey said they had flexible employment). In America Baylies thinks the real number is nearly 2m—"America's best kept secret," he calls it. Academics say they detect a slight trend towards more such couples.

This partly reflects a new economic reality. America's Department of Labour says a quarter of working women out-earn their men. The OECD reports that the share is even higher elsewhere—29% in Canada and New Zealand, and a third in Portugal. A survey in Britain, which has no official study, reported that 39% of full-time working women believed they were earning more than their husband or partner.

Those men who swap roles fall into two broad categories: the yummy daddies, taking a few years out to look after the children while their higher-earning wife toils on; and the nest-builders, who stay at home to support women executives consumed by what Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an American academic and campaigner, has called "extreme jobs". Some very well paid careers at the top of banking, the law, politics and business demand a 70- to 80-hour working week. Alpha partners need spouses willing to look after them between international trips and to take responsibility for the children and the household. "In New York and London there is now a small group of people who are earning megabucks and that changes the incentives for the other partner to work," says Hewlett, speaking from the Centre for Work-Life Policy at Columbia University in New York. "There is weird stuff going on, because of the sheer heft of the remuneration packages."

Among the highly educated in America the enormous earning power of one spouse, usually the man, domesticates the other. Surveys of female graduates of Harvard Business School show only 38% in full-time work. Hewlett observes that they have married their successful male peers, put down their briefcases and picked up an apron. "Given the fact that the family did not need her income and given his hours and the demands of his job, she's at home."

Hewlett is at pains to point out that when the high-earner is female, a supportive spouse is rare. But some high-achieving women do manage to swap and some of their men spend all their time looking after the home. Juliet Blanch, head of international dispute resolution at McDermott Will & Emery, the American law firm, has a family that she sees only on weekday mornings before she catches the train from Surrey into her London office. When we speak, she is looking at a schedule that has her away for three of the next six weekends, leaving her husband John, a former lawyer, in sole charge of their son and two daughters. "So you see," she explains, "he really does have to deal with this as if he was a single dad."

Jessica (not her real name), is a senior American banker in her 40s. Over coffee in Canary Wharf, she tells how her macho husband has become an ideal wife, the darling of local mothers and the attentive father to their two daughters. Richard (again, not his real name) delights in reading "Little House on the Prairie" with them, then amuses himself when they are at school by keeping fit, updating the family website, a bit of gentle day trading, and poker games with his friends and her clients. "I think he's really appreciative of living like this," Jessica says, "and it's all provided by investment banking—we don't need both of us to work. We are two strong individuals in our own right, so it was a question of getting used to it, and we have, God bless, a ton of money."

Regulars at the Wimbledon playgroup dwell in a less rarefied atmosphere, members of a larger swathe that is affluent, but not super-wealthy. There is chat about private school, but no one has an expensive nanny; most of the >

THE SOHOVICH FAMILY
MINNEAPOLIS OCTOBER 2007
PHOTOGRAPH BY [illegible]

WEBCAM AT BEDTIME: ONE COUPLE'S STORY

"I couldn't have risen to my level without a supportive spouse," says JoAnna Sohovich, general manager for field devices at Honeywell International. "I couldn't do it without him. It doesn't make it easy, but it does make it possible."

Now living in Minneapolis with their young son, Xavier, JoAnna and Robert have moved four times during her nine years with the company so that she could take up promotions

"We decided that whoever enjoyed their job more, that would be the primary career, and the other would fill in the gaps," says Robert, a full-time, stay-at-home father. He's proud of his wife, whom he describes as "a pioneer"

But both partners see JoAnna's absences as a sacrifice: the demands of her job have left little time to be close to her baby, even when Xavier was very small. After two months' maternity leave, JoAnna expressed and froze quantities of breast milk and went back to a job that calls for up to two days' travel a week, and five week-long trips and two trips abroad each year

Robert has hooked up a webcam in the nursery so that his wife can watch Xavier settling down at night from her hotel room or airport lounge, and he sends her constant e-mail pictures and updates on developments at home. "I don't feel quite so disconnected to be able to just check my BlackBerry and see what's going on," she says. "But it's hard on a business trip with a 7am to 11pm schedule, to slip away for half an hour at a time to express milk."

The couple met at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. JoAnna became one of the first women to serve on a warship—one of 13 among 3,000 men on the *USS Essex*. "We were all equals, shipmates and team-mates," Robert says It was good training for a role that is still extremely unusual in the American Midwest. When JoAnna was on deployment, Robert joined the "wives' club" and made care packages along with the women. "On the ship, you do what's necessary. I've accepted this role from the get-go, and I don't think either of us sees it as secondary. It's what's best for the family."

As his wife rises through the civilian ranks, Robert is sometimes called out on parade. No big deal, he says. Accompanying JoAnna to a lecture she was giving at Purdue University in Indiana, he caused a stir on the spouses' organised outings. "We toured a flower shop, made a bouquet, toured a bead shop and made necklaces and I quite enjoyed talking to the ladies In fact I was the centre of attention."

> fathers talk proudly about refusing to hand their children over to childminders. Their partners' jobs may not qualify as extreme but still demand constant presence. The decision to swap gender roles may not be a necessity, but the money has given them a choice.

Steve, a tall, good-looking Scot who has come with his ebullient, curly-haired daughter, explains that when his wife, who works in finance, became pregnant with their elder child, she put their earnings and likely child-care costs into a spreadsheet. It became obvious that he should give up his job in financial IT, which he didn't really enjoy, and take care of the family.

Paul recommends the experience: "It's extremely rewarding to see your kids grow up. We're very, very lucky, and the children benefit because they get the male attention all day and then in the evening they get input from the wife—I know she does more with them than I would if I was coming home knackered."

Like several others here, he sees his stint at home as a four- or five-year career break. Some are preparing for the difficult return to work even before the children have entered school—encouraged by partners who don't want the burden of permanently supporting the family. One has been studying for an MBA, another an undergraduate history-of-art course, which has led to a part-time job with an auction house. That business-school dissertation still needs writing, but father and daughter now have co-ordinated afternoon naps, which makes it easier to stay up late and work at the computer after the womenfolk have settled down for the night. "You have to have something else going on," the would-be entrepreneur shrugs. "Otherwise..."

JULIET BLANCH'S HUSBAND John doesn't think he will work again. He was never, he admits, likely to make partner in his own law firm. By the time their third child arrived eight years ago, his wife was earning so much that he didn't need to go back. Juliet and John met when they were ten years old, and went from childhood sweethearts to fellow aspiring lawyers and then husband and wife. "She's always been my best friend, which is not always the way with couples," says John, who believes they experience less tension >

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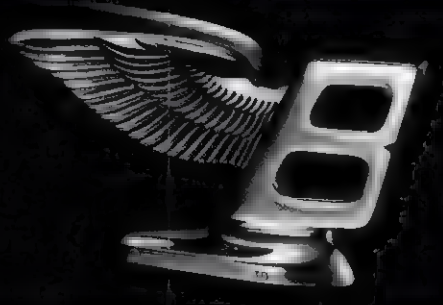

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THE BLANCH FAMILY
GUILDFORD OCTOBER 2007

> than a role reversal might cause for a couple with competing egos. "You could almost consider us one person."

Happily holed up in Guildford and preparing to bring the children back for tea (he is famous among local families for his chicken nuggets), John tells me that intellectual stimulation is the only aspect of working life that he misses. But he feels connected to his old world via Juliet and understands the pressures she is under: "You can't give what is required for a serious job without back-up at home—the travel, the phone calls across time zones." When she is at home he lets her sleep in one day of every weekend to recover, and she understands his need when she gets home late in the evenings to moan about the homework. "He's desperate for some adult company."

Jessica has also handed over control of the home to Richard. They have been together on and off since they met at university, aged 19, and theirs is, they both say, an ideal marriage of opposites. "He's in charge...I don't want to clean up, I don't do dishes, I don't even know how to use the washing machine," she exclaims in delight. "He's going to choose how to do things for the girls, and I'm OK with that. And he takes care of the family money, organises the holidays—I never seem to have cash on me." Richard, a former engineer, is reticent, masculine, and, she says, less emotional: "so much better at [parenting] than me, calmer, less hyper-competent, more patient."

Admitting he may not pick up on the odd flicker of disapproval his wife feels directed at them, Richard observes: "You probably do need self-confidence to do this, because society has such a grip on people." He runs the household, she explains, "on his own terms". That means not giving his girls every outing they want; not killing himself catering for the PTA when they have meetings at his house; not needing to prepare great meals all the time (he'll cook a big lasagne, but often the family eat takeaways); and not, above all, feeling the guilt that seems to plague so many mothers. "Men have an ability to only do what they want to do," the pinstriped mistress of the universe observes, "whereas women are suckers."

IT ALL SEEMS organised and harmonious—"from each according to his or her abilities", say husbands and wives alike. They would recommend it to hard-pressed, dual-income couples everywhere. But several refuse to speak about swapping roles, and even some high-powered women grow nervous when the subject comes up. The men who will talk don't—won't—complain about their set-up. They repeatedly buttress their maleness by calling their situation "logical".

David Hewison, senior couple psychoanalytic psychotherapist at the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships in north London, thinks couples hide their anxieties. Even when the swap works, each partner "tries not to let the side down" when the subject comes up, he says. "And it's hard to talk about, which suggests that the stereotypes still run very strongly."

A full-time father may attract curiosity verging on suspicion, because he clashes with our expectations. But this very curiosity, Hewison suggests, gives a father privileges denied to most mothers. As rarities, these men have value and interest, and therefore status. "It's an adventure, a bit of a holiday for them, it's not like a kind of life sentence. Also, you get a lot of attention from women, which is nice."

When Matt left the advertising agency, he recalls a colleague pumping his hand repeatedly, saying "I admire you, mate, but I couldn't do it." Jessica's square-jawed consort attracts a lot of admiration—at parties the working husbands complain they are tired of being compared unfavourably with this paragon. Juliet sounds frustrated at this attitude: "Women say 'It's brilliant! He's coping!' But why? He's an intelligent sentient being, like all of us." Jessica's female colleagues ask how she got so lucky.

And yet, displaying a certain anxiety, they also ask whether her husband "still feels manly". She and the other women I met try to protect their partners from feeling power-

less—for instance by not competing on his turf and by surrendering power in a few symbolic areas. Most of the women made a point of telling me their husbands manage the household finances, even if the men are also doing the laundry and sewing the nametags. The alpha wives are also careful about conferences and work dinners. "He's a good sport about it," says Jessica, "but we keep them to a minimum." John says he prefers to take a back seat unless Juliet really needs him to show up as an official consort: "Inevitably conversation comes round to work, and you're sort of pushing the mushrooms round the side of the plate…"

Alongside this domestic ego-support, fathers now have the online networks, support groups and what in America has become something like a political movement, with annual conventions and angry bloggers monitoring stereotypical representations in the media.

Dr Kyle Pruett, a professor of child psychiatry at Yale who has been following a group of families like these for the past 16 years, has become a somewhat reluctant figurehead for this movement, because his research shows that children develop normally in their fathers' care. He sees full-time fatherhood "slowly inching forward, but it's never going to take the world by storm."

Far more interesting, Pruett feels, and possibly a factor that could limit the number of couples who make the switch, is the other, female side of the story. He observes from his research that there is a limit to how far women are happy with the arrangement, even if it makes sense. As the years go by, Pruett has observed that the women in his study who are the sole breadwinners face a struggle not to feel they are sacrificing too much of their femaleness. "The babies are fine," he says, "the men are OK, but I believe it is a much more complicated journey for the mothers."

Juliet is conscious of what she has given up, even though she's confident the whole family is thriving: "I've had to relinquish the decision-making about how the children are being brought up, which is a big thing if you've given birth to them." John says he has had pangs of guilt about that—but credits Juliet's motherliness during each of the children's infancies, a stage that he, at 15 stone and six foot two, found hard. "They were so small and floppy and vulnerable. You're holding this little bundle and you feel very big and cumbersome."

Richard, too, became interested in his daughters once he could see that they were speaking, thinking and processing information. But he seems less impressed with caring for a small baby. "When the kids were very young it was horrible," he says with feeling. "I can't look after a child of three years or under, you have to have a nanny for that. There's no intellectual stimulation and you can't control their day." Jessica says she "loved the little helpless baby stage" and negotiated a four-month break after the first birth, an "idyllic" six months after the second.

An optimist would say that the attention focused on fathers like the Wimbledon group, now packing the biscuits into their Tupperware containers and leading the toddlers in a last-minute race around the hall, might help raise the kudos of parenting in general. Matt, along with most of the other men, has come to feel strongly that the work of bringing up the next generation is undervalued. "I have heard lots of stay-at-home mums say 'Oh I just look after the kids', which isn't right."

But Hewison takes what he calls "a slightly cynical view…It's now got prestige exactly because men are doing it—it's the kind of gender-role skewing that goes on everywhere. Men are claiming to be special for doing something that women do anyway and aren't allowed to claim to be special for," he observes. "It suggests that men need to have their identity and status protected in a way that women don't.

And Pruett warns that some fathers, especially the younger men, are so relieved to be proving their competence once they see their children are happy and healthy under their care, that their pride verges on hubris. It can sound as if they are dismissing the mother and edging her out. As an American ex-marine, now living in London and looking after his 19-month-old son, told me, "There's only one thing a man cannot do and that is give birth—I can do everything else."

If the attention on these full-time fathers is to raise the status of parenting in general, it should not be at the expense of motherhood. And perhaps we should be patient about the anxieties stirred up when the sexes swap places so radically. After all, as Richard muses, puzzled by how females can cope with "just rocking a baby" day and night, "Human beings are not evolving as quickly as our society is changing."

Assumptions about male and female roles are far from being bred out of us, even in these pioneering families. Pruett tells a story about how the child of a stay-at-home father and working mother shocked his parents by drawing a family portrait—the man in a suit, ready for the office and the woman wearing an apron. After all their hard work, "the mother was really upset because she wanted this child to honour the sacrifice she was making, and the father really wanted to be seen as nurturing."

■

the man who glimpsed utopia

A modern Moscow stage is a dangerous place for Russia's great 19th-century exiles. Which is exactly why Alexei Borodin puts them there. ARKADY OSTROVSKY, who translated Stoppard's "The Coast of Utopia", tells his story

"YOU ARE A sentimental lot," said Tom Stoppard as he watched the first night of his trilogy, "The Coast of Utopia", in Moscow in October. The production begins and ends with a song, an old 19th-century romance, something about the dreams and shadows of the past, about the memory that erases the faces of loved ones but preserves the sounds of their voices—indeed a sentimental Russian affair.

A young woman in a simple, white 19th-century dress sings it quietly and clearly while polishing wine glasses at a family dinner-table. The scene is bathed in warm summer-evening light and the poetry of a country estate. There is no mention of this song in the text. It comes from the director, Alexei Borodin. "It is my favourite romance—I used to play it to my sisters." The world created by Stoppard's imagination Borodin recognises as his own: the song, like a thread, connects the two. >

ALEXEI BORODIN
RUSSIAN NATIONAL YOUTH THEATRE
MOSCOW, OCTOBER 2007
ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX GRONSKY

TOM STOPPARD
OUTS DE THE RUSSIAN NAT ONA.
YOUTH THEATRE
RIGHT KITAY GOROD DISTRICT

> The plays have been successfully staged in London and in New York, where the production collected seven Tony awards. The Russian version is different from the intellectually and emotionally engaging London performance or the sleek and energised New York one. In Moscow the lyrical notes introduced by the director have turned an epic trilogy that spans several decades and countries into a Russian affair that a Russian audience takes to heart.

Afterwards, the spectators argue not about the merits of the production, but about what has been said on stage. This surprises Stoppard: "It is as if people are responding to statements. They seem to imply that my plays fill some sort of gap—I don't quite believe it." He should.

From the moment Stoppard responded to the letter which led to my translating the plays into Russian, he talked about his fantasy of seeing them performed in Russia—"as a test for the play and a homage to the culture which inspired it". He wanted to know how his Russian characters, many of whom died in exile, would be received at home. In fact, bringing the plays to Russia turned out to be as much of a test for the country as it was for the plays.

Russian theatre was not receptive to the idea behind the trilogy. The characters, Russian liberal thinkers of the 19th century, had been appropriated by Soviet ideology and evoked a yawn or resentment—often both. A few young and fashionable directors read the plays and turned them down. The chance of success was low; the investment in time and commitment too high. But then Borodin, artistic director of the Russian National Youth Theatre (RAMT), read the trilogy and felt that he had to do it—that he could not *not* do it. It took courage and honesty—he had both.

Borodin is neither glamorous nor cutting-edge. In his thick-frame glasses and pressed shirts he looks more like an academic, than a theatre director. He is rarely spotted in Moscow society. His audience comes to the show by metro, not a chauffeur-driven Mercedes.

He worked on the trilogy for two years with a conviction and zeal that left many of his colleagues bewildered. The stage of the 19th-century theatre next to the Bolshoi seemed too small for the trilogy and its 60-odd characters, so Borodin extended it. A wooden platform, like the deck of a ship, breaks into the auditorium and cuts into the first few rows.

On this deck, Stoppard's characters spend ten hours and the best part of their lives. Here they fall in love, scrap over the taste of coffee and the course of Russian history; wrestle with the philosophical questions of their day and struggle to express love. Here the sun sets over the idyllic country estate that belonged to the father of Russia's first anarchist, Mikhail Bakunin, as Vissarion Belinsky, the literary critic, tries to work out the meaning of art. Here Alexander Herzen suffers the loss of his seven-year-old son, who drowns at sea, and has his beliefs in human nature crushed first by the French revolution, then (posthumously) by the Russian one.

Amid the vanity and din of modern Russian culture, it all seems a bit incongruous. The characters with their long speeches, old-fashioned sentiments and compassion do not fit easily into modern Russia. The performance does not fit the formula for success—no glamour, no farce, no cannibalism, no post-modern twist.

Yet the audience's enthusiasm on the opening night defied the critics' predictions of failure. As the curtain fell, the house feted the actors, the director and the playwright with ovations, flowers and curtain calls. There were tears and elation backstage. Young actors danced the Can-Can and lifted the 66-year-old Borodin into the air. It was not just a celebration of two years of work, but also of an important victory, an act of defiance, vindication of the idea that Russian theatre should be more than just entertainment.

Belinsky would have been cheering louder than anyone. The man who first sparked Stoppard's interest in the 19th-century Russian thinkers saw the importance of literature not in its artistic form or its civic duty, but in its power to reveal the truth about life—its meaning and purpose. "What kind of literature and what kind of life is the same question," as Belinsky says in the play.

It is still the same in Russia today. Borodin's production has everything to do with modern Russian >

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> life, its ideas and ideals, its comprehension of the past and contemplation of the future. "In other countries", Belinsky says, "the advance of civilised behaviour is everybody's business. In Russia, there is no division of labour, literature has to do it all."

That leaves Belinsky and Herzen with plenty to do. They have arrived on Russia's shores just as the history of Russian thought is up for grabs, when a fight is raging for the country's identity and for its past. Everything Herzen detested is being resurrected—censorship, the autocracy of the Russian state, a macabre union of Orthodoxy, nationalism and authoritarianism. After almost 15 years of a democratic experiment following the collapse of Communism, Russia's middle class is voluntarily surrendering personal liberties for a notional stability just as the French did in 1848. As one of the audience declared, "I feel that this production is so up to date that it could be shut down."

Russian state ideologists are hard at work trying to persuade themselves and the country that democracy and respect for individual rights and liberty are of no use to its people, that Russia always prospered when it was ruled by despotic tsars and that there is nothing in Russian history to be embarrassed about. The characters have returned to a country where their dreams about justice and freedom evoke mostly sneers, whereas Nicholas I, one of Russia's most senseless autocrats, evokes sympathy and respect. "I'd love to read an article by Herzen, with his lacerating wit, about contemporary Russia," Stoppard says.

Russian history has never been kind to Herzen and his circle. Isaiah Berlin, who inspired Stoppard's interest in Herzen, wrote that "the singular irony of history was that Herzen—who wanted individual liberty more than happiness, or efficiency or justice, and denounced organised planning, economic centralisation and governmental authority—was canonised by the Soviet government, whose genesis he understood better and feared more than Dostoyevsky did."

But the Soviet system did not just distort these men's ideas. It did its best to wipe out the type of people who looked to their ideas for guidance. During the Soviet period, Russia still produced intellectual giants and great writers. It had its Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, but it squeezed out the close reader of Belinsky's pulsating articles and Herzen's unhurried memoirs, the person who shared their sentiments and their rejection of enslavement (whichever form it takes): an educated middle class.

The Soviet and post-Soviet eras also deformed the language that expressed those sentiments. Words like honour and duty were first extolled and abused by the Communists then turned into a joke by their successors. Stoppard's trilogy has not only taken off layers of bronze paint from Herzen or Belinsky and brought them back to life, it has rehabilitated their language.

But it needed someone to make these words and ideas their own—to translate them onto the stage and into life. Why did Alexei Borodin take on that role? Why did he respond to the plays that left so many of his colleagues cold? Perhaps because he possesses the qualities needed to stage them, because they celebrated liberty, individualism and compassion, which resonated with his own life.

Borodin was born and grew up in China, in a good, ordinary family that preserved the ethos and instincts of Russia's pre-revolutionary middle class. When he was 14 years old, he was "replanted" into native Russian soil—and took roots. For the past 50 years he has lived in Russia, according to the principles he learnt from his parents and from Russian literature. His immune system was strong enough to survive the Soviet experiment and resist post-Soviet compromises.

At the end of the trilogy, Herzen says: "Our meaning is in how we live in an imperfect world, in our time. We have no other." It is a sentiment that is close to Borodin's heart. He is now calling back Russian thinkers from their exile. His production of Stoppard's trilogy is an attempt to awaken the dormant genes that were once common in educated Russian men. But the genes of fear and enslavement are dormant too and can just as easily be awakened.

His production is part of a cultural foundation on which a new educated middle class could rise up. The prime >

"We ran up and saw all the roofs and cupolas of the city shining in the setting sun and suddenly embraced and made a sacred vow"

THE VIEW FROM SPARROW HILLS

> audience of the Youth Theatre included his own children and grandchildren. Many of the spectators grew up in post-Communist Russia. Which past they choose will determine Russia's future.

AN OLD BLACK-and-white family film captures little girls in neat dresses with large ribbons, and an open-faced seven-year-old boy with big ears and an even bigger smile. Someone carries out a samovar into the garden. Three sisters and a brother, a perfect Chekhovian set; a two-storey house with a large garden; seven Chinese servants; Russian books and songs; and dreams of going to Moscow, where none of the family had ever been...The year is 1948. A new wave of Stalinist repression is spreading through the Soviet Union, consuming Jewish doctors, scientists, artists and the newly repatriated. But the Borodins live in a world tied to 19th-century Russia, even as the country their grandparents and parents left behind has been racked by social upheaval.

Borodin's family did not know the horrors of the civil war, the blood of the revolution, the all-pervasive fear of Stalin's great terror, or the brutal collectivisation. His father was born in Russia, but had left before the Bolshevik revolution, and his mother had never been to the country. Their house was in the French concession and Borodin's first school was a Catholic college, St Jeanne D'Arc. To Borodin, Russia was the best country in the world. It was Utopia with Russian books and Russian films.

Soviet films were shown in a Soviet Sports Club which opened towards the end of the war. They depicted the cornucopia of Soviet life that made his longing for Russia all the stronger. After one film, he refused to ride home in a rickshaw and walked home After reading a book about Alexander Matrosov—a 19-year-old soldier who died heroically for the Motherland and for Stalin—he put up a poster in his room: Stalin with the Motherland in the background. "The Soviet country—like some sunny city—is calling, luring, looming in the distance."

The dream of returning to the Soviet Union was shared by many Russian émigrés, inspired both by war-time patriotism and by Stalin's call for repatriation; Soviet consulates started to issue Soviet passports to those who had emigrated before the revolution. In 1949 the thought of moving became more urgent when Mao's army took over Shanghai.

A good man at the Soviet consulate persuaded the Borodins not to rush back—to let the children grow up and to settle their business affairs. He knew more than he could let on, and he probably saved Borodin's life. In 1949 a ship

with Russian repatriates left Shanghai and the Borodins went to see it off. "We envied them so much, lucky souls, they were going home." They were not to know that many of those on board were sent straight to the gulag, where some of them would perish. The Borodins did not receive permission to enter the Soviet Union until 1953, the year of Stalin's death. "When I was told that we got our visas, I thought I would die of happiness. My mother said she would get drunk and climb onto the table." That day there was a party in Borodin's house for all their Shanghai friends. His mother was in a red evening-dress, while Uncle Kolya sang songs about the Motherland.

They occupied two carriages: one for the family and one for their belongings—leather chairs, mahogany cabinets, hand-woven carpets and a grand piano. The train went through Manchuria to Kazakhstan, where the Borodins were supposed to live and work the virgin land. The first station after crossing the border was Otpor, which in Russian means repulse. A drunk lying on the platform ("Mama, look, there is an ill man on the platform. We must help him"), the smell of cheap cigarettes and vodka, the dusty Kazakh steppe—all this seemed different from the free and sunny country of their dreams.

For the first year they stayed in Chimkent, a concrete town in Kazakhstan, which had served as a transit point for millions of prisoners bound for the gulag, and shared a flat with their Shanghai friends at the back of the Operetta theatre. The memory is still fresh of the dark auditorium, where a special sofa was put in front of the house for the children, and the magic of the first night; the evenings spent by the radio listening to "Anna Karenina".

After a year in Kazakhstan they moved to Moscow. "The first thing our mother did when we came here was to take us to the Sparrow Hills. There is a photograph of us all standing here in our white dresses." Natalia Nikolaeva, one of Borodin's three sisters, tells me this as we drive past the Sparrow Hills with Tom Stoppard. It was one of the first places in Moscow where Stoppard had asked to be taken when he came four years ago. There Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev, both 13, made their famous pledge to avenge the Decembrists. "We ran up and saw all the roofs and cupolas of the city shining in the setting sun and suddenly embraced and made a sacred vow..."

The Borodins could have bought a flat in the centre of Moscow, but instead they moved into a wooden house with a mezzanine and two large stoves in Pushkino, a few miles from Moscow on the banks of the quiet Klyazma river. (The area was once popular with rich Russian capitalists.) It was a substitute for the Shanghai mansion.

The Russian language does not distinguish between a house and a home, but the Borodins definitely had a home, full of the rituals that are the pulse of daily life. All three sisters joined in Alexei's home-theatre (their grandmother made the costumes). There were still the family meals at the oval table, the cakes for Easter; the white, starched tablecloth; the floor-polishing every Sunday. But the servants belonged back in China, so now this was family work. Borodin's father found a job as an engineer in a factory, his mother translated from English. Money was short, but "our parents did everything they could to preserve this atmosphere of home which was so important to us."

Borodin's student friends who visited the house recall its Chekhovian feel and its openness. It was a place where people talked, argued, sang till the small hours. The house was not cut off. "My parents knew exactly what country they lived in, but they managed to preserve some basic principles. I remember my father used to repeat 'how do you stop the grind of broken life?'." The sound of "grinding life" is distinct in Stoppard's trilogy and Chekhov's plays.

As Chekhov knew best, the tectonic breaks, the "grind of history", begin with cracks in family estates and the disappearance of a family home. That sense of home in Stoppard's trilogy, in Chekhov's plays and in Borodin's life is inseparable from its loss. First the Borodins sold what they had brought from China. Then, after the death of the parents, they sold the house. Yet, even after the house was gone, the mutual support and reliance on each other remained.

By that time Borodin was finishing drama school and directing his diploma production in Smolensk. The season of 1967-68 was one of the hardest for him and for the country. His first production, based on a story by a soon-to-be émigré writer, Vladimir Voinovich, was denounced as "avant-garde" and "blasphemous". His second, "The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams, got the artistic director of the Smolensk theatre fired. Then he received the worst news of all: his mother had died. "Our world collapsed overnight, suddenly we were on our own, faced with reality."

"Reality" was the winter of 1968, the end of the post-Stalin thaw. Within a few months, Soviet tanks rolled into Prague. The world of Borodin's family and the Russian intelligentsia were invaded too. "If it hadn't been for my sisters, my wife, the friends of my parents, I would probably have broken down. I realised that the only meaning in life is not to lose oneself—that is the most important thing." Borodin does not talk about "dignity", "strength", "duty": these words are part of his nature, not his vocabulary.

As a young director Borodin was sent away to Vyatka, a good 18th-century merchants' town that had once been Herzen's place of exile. And just as it was for Herzen, those years were the happiest for Borodin. "I had my home and my theatre, my theatre and my home, my theatre-home." Borodin wanted to create an accessible and artistic theatre that would enlighten people's lives. "I always tell this story >

"I can say Russia is a great country with gaiety, but I can't say it with a straight face. In fact, saying it loudly means you don't love it really"

> I invented about a life on a plantation: you have your own furrow and you chop along it—chop, chop. You raise your eyes and see that your furrow ends beyond a horizon, you lower your eyes and chop again."

After several years of chopping away in Vyatka, he was invited to Moscow to head the Central Theatre for Children in 1980. The building had once housed a salon where Herzen's father probably attended society balls. A century later it was given over to the theatre led by Chekhov's nephew and which was shut down by Stalin in 1936, the year Herzen's daughter died. After the war the theatre became a haven—and an exile—for talented actors and directors rejected by "grown up" theatres. (Many of them would lead the regeneration of Russian theatre after Stalin's death.) The Central Theatre for Children was right in the centre of Moscow, yet, somehow preserved its autonomy. Borodin tried to keep it that way.

The country was in deep, and, it seemed at the time, permanent stagnation. Yet, the theatre life of those years was rich in talent. Its artistic energy seemed to compensate for the lack of movement in politics or the economy. When in 1983 Borodin staged a two-evening long adaptation of Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" it was a burst of energy, but also of romanticism and compassion. "I always firmly believed that theatre is only interesting when it counteracts life, not when it serves it or tries to adjust to it."

Borodin's theatre, like his home, never tried to cut itself off from life outside. When Communism collapsed Moscow's central street turned into one big flea market, where elderly people, impoverished overnight, were selling everything that they could, from a carton of milk to old clothes. Borodin remembers seeing the funeral of an actor in a theatre across the square from his. "The coffin was lifted from a hearse and carried into the theatre. Immediately, the hearse was taken over by street traders selling underwear."

Borodin's response was to stage Racine's "Berenice", a 17th-century classical tragedy about duty, written in Alexandrine verse. It had seemingly no connection to what was going on outside his theatre's windows. But he saw it as the responsibility of art to bring order and structure to a world that was falling apart in front of his eyes.

"THE COAST OF UTOPIA"
RUSSIAN NATIONAL YOUTH THEATRE

Today Russian life is solidifying into a rigid, complacent and stagnant structure. It is the moment to stage Stoppard's trilogy about romantic revolutionaries and Utopian thinkers. "I needed this play like air, with its heightened sense of justice and his uncompromising, rebellious characters," Borodin says. "I don't know where we are moving, but I think I can distinguish between black and white, between what is true and what is false, between honour and baseness. I don't want to hear that I should take something into consideration, that baseness or villainy are not really baseness and villainy and that it is all temporary and will lead to some common good."

Borodin's production is an antidote to the poisonous atmosphere in Russia's public life, to the constant shifting of right and wrong. It is a reminder that there was a time when patriotism did not translate into xenophobia, when pragmatism did not justify dishonour and when irony did not rule out love for your country. "I can say Russia is a great country with gaiety, but I can't say it with a straight face. In fact, saying it loudly means you don't love it really."

Borodin's theatre was never a symbol of resistance nor a stronghold of opposition. It was an oasis of intelligence and a stronghold of decency. Rather than being elitist, it worked in the mainstream of Russian culture and was accessible to all and responsive to the life outside the theatre.

Borodin is not a fighter. But his gentle manner conceals a firmness and conviction that tie him to Herzen. "I still have this naive, foolish belief that theatre can play some role in people's lives. You know, I once was walking through the empty foyer and caught myself talking aloud. I said this silly phrase: 'nobody will divert me from my path'. It just came out of me. And then I laughed."

■

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VERY FIRST NIGHTS

In the holidays, thousands of children will have their first taste of theatre—and be astounded, delighted or terrified. NICK COLEMAN asked some writers, directors and performers to recall when the curtain went up for them

BERYL BAINBRIDGE, NOVELIST

I have two main memories of being taken to the theatre as a child. One was "Dr Faustus" by Marlowe, which might have been at the Royal Court in Liverpool. I was about 11. Now, how can I put this? A dirty rhyme had been going round the school and it had arrived in my gym-slip pocket. My mother must have found it when she was doing the laundry. It was my birthday and she was taking me to the theatre. And as soon as I met her in Liverpool I remember thinking, "God, there's something wrong here."

I can't remember much about "Dr Faustus" except that the seven deadly sins were in it. I whispered to my mother, "What's lechery?" She replied, "I'd have thought you'd have known ... Beryl." Pretty awful, actu-

PUPPET THEATRE IN THE TUILERIES

ally. I was thrown out of school eventually for it. Before meeting me that day, she had taken the note to the headmistress. That was how things were dealt with in those days. They couldn't cope.

The other lovely memory was Cecily Courtneidge and Jack Hulbert in "Dick Whittington"—the music, the lights, this woman who was supposed to be a man, striding about with bare legs, and somebody called Cat lolloping on behind. I thought it was beautiful. It was towards the end of the war so I'd have been about eight. It was either the Empire or the Royal Court. I remember the velvet tip-up seats, the beautiful shiny, burning red. And all the bursts of laughter and wanting to understand what the joke was about.

I was sort of prepared for it because my father always listened to "Saturday Night Theatre" on the radio. He'd turn the light out and we'd sit in the firelight just listening to the words. But I wasn't prepared for the music and colour. It was another world—if only you could break into it!

After "Dick Whittington" the world wasn't changed exactly, but I do remember trying to do tap dancing and humming songs. You certainly came out as if you'd been drinking, rather, even as children. A tremendous elation. And it was about that time that my mother saw an advertisement in the *Liverpool Echo* and I joined "Children's Hour" in Manchester as a child actor, with Billie Whitelaw and Judith Chalmers and the chap that wrote "Coronation Street". Maybe she sensed there was something about the theatre that made things better for me.

MATTHEW BOURNE, DIRECTOR AND CHOREOGRAPHER

At about 13, I was taken to see Angela Lansbury in the musical "Gypsy" in the West End. She was famous. She was in the film "Bedknobs and Broomsticks", which had come out the year before. Very exciting. For once we weren't in the Upper Circle but in the back row of the stalls, where Angela Lansbury made her first entrance.

And the show itself made me fall in love with theatre. It was about theatre: one of those pieces that on the surface feels a little bit conventional, but actually has a darkness to it, which turns it into a great show. It's something I've tried to do myself ever since, to entertain on several levels, not just in a frivolous way but on deeper and darker levels as well. It had everything for me. I wanted to be in it—I auditioned to be one of the newsboys. Didn't get the part.

Being in an audience having a great time also made a huge impression. I still love it. I never watch my own work from the side or come in and out. I always sit in the middle, >

> from beginning to end. It's the sharing aspect, the sharing of a great time.

A couple of years later, "A Chorus Line" opened in London. I was at that age when you're assessing who you are, and the show was all about that. It was the discussion each character had about themselves, talking about their lives honestly. That was new to me, and actually more interesting than the dancing. "Gypsy" made me love theatre, but "A Chorus Line" made me grow up and face myself.

Matthew Bourne's "Nutcracker!" is at Sadler's Wells, London EC1, December 13th to January 20th, then touring the UK www.matthewbournesnutcracker.com

CARLOS ACOSTA, DANCER

My father had pushed me into becoming a dancer against my will. I wanted to be a footballer—I didn't care about ballet. But he saw ballet as a way out for me. As a teenager he used to sneak into movie theatres, and saw ballet in the silent movies. He was very taken by it, but it was out of the question for him, because at that time it was only for white people. But ballet was always in the back of his head. So in the end, my first experience of the theatre was also my first show, at ballet school. Towards the end of the year we got to perform for the first time. It was the first time I felt important.

Carlos Acosta is in his own show at the Coliseum, London WC2, March 31st to April 3rd www.eno.org

PATRICK MARBER, PLAYWRIGHT

I grew up in the London suburbs and we'd always go to the local panto. I never really liked it and I still don't—it was spooky. From an early age I smelled a rat: I knew something was being peddled here, that had the whiff of authenticity but also the stink of...bollocks. But I loved the experience of being in the dark and not knowing what was going to happen.

The first play I can really remember was a ghost story, called "The Ghost Train", at the Old Vic or Richmond Theatre. I was gripped. It was about smuggling, about being all alone at a country station, and maybe these people were dead or maybe they were alive and there was a terrifying train that thundered through and you leapt out of your seat. I was very, very taken with that. Terrifying.

The first time I felt like a grown-up going to the theatre was when I was about 14. In the school holidays I'd take myself off on the train to Waterloo and the National Theatre, and see everything that was on. I'd go to the matinee of one show and the evening performance of another, and in between I'd sit in the café and read plays and programmes and breathe it all in. It was one way of seeing what the adult world was like. At school, all adults are your enemy, stopping you from doing stuff. And in the theatre I was completely free to sit quietly and watch adults behaving, knowing I wasn't an adult, yet feeling equally that I wasn't a child—and that I could make judgments on them and that my opinion was mine and I was allowed it. I'd be there all day on my own. My secret place. I still like going to the theatre on my own. It felt very exciting. It was exciting.

My favourite line in modern playwriting is in "Our Country's Good" by Timberlake Wertenbaker. In the play some convicts are performing "The Recruiting Officer"; a young woman called Mary is about to go out onto the stage and her line, a propos of nothing, is "I love this!" It moves me just to think about that. It connects you right back to a feeling you had as a child, that something magical and mysterious is about to happen and it might change the way you think and feel for ever.

Patrick Marber's "Dealer's Choice" is at Trafalgar Studios, London SW1, to March 29th www.theambassadors.com

JULIET STEVENSON, ACTOR

My first experience of theatre was being taken to see an amateur production of an Agatha Christie play in Malta, where we lived for three years while my dad was stationed there in the army. My mum was the romantic female lead. And I remember having to be taken out screaming because, at the denouement, a man jumped out of a cupboard and shot her in the arm. An image of my mum being shot in this vulnerable, passive way was just horrible. Too much. It was unbearable to be in the room and watch it. I must have been six.

Children absolutely cannot discriminate between artifice and reality. My first memories of theatre are all about that—terrible at the time, but subsequently wonderful. And at your best, that's what you're doing when you're acting. Of course you're aware that it's a complicated plaiting of >

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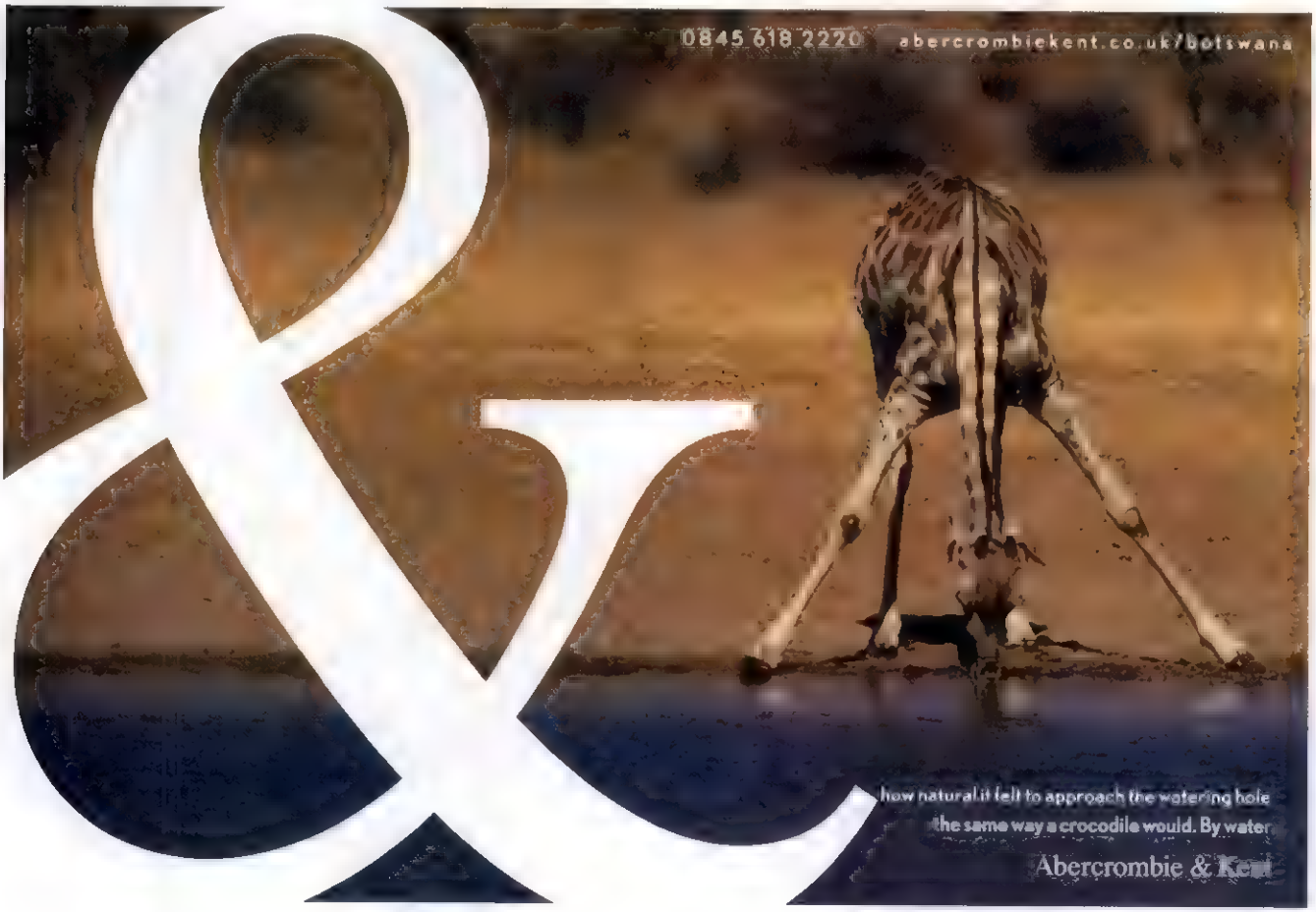
> artifice and reality, but I know I do my best work when I go into that state—total immersion in the fiction.

My father took me to "The Sound of Music" on one brief trip to England, when I was about seven. It was only a year after the shooting of my mum, but I had no trepidation. The novelty of England, London and this socking great West End theatre overwhelmed me with excitement. Subsequently, when we lived in England, we saw a lot at Windsor repertory theatre, and that's when this passion arose—even though probably a lot of what I saw was really quite cronky. But I do remember the sensation of settling in your seat and waiting for the lights to dim on you, settling into a state of quiet ecstasy. The sense of immersion in fiction was something I wanted from an early age—to get out of your own life and into somebody else's. I don't know why—I had a perfectly happy childhood.

RUFUS NORRIS, THEATRE DIRECTOR

I grew up in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Malaysia, and there the idea of "theatre" was somewhat different. When I was four, we went to a northern Ethiopian medieval walled town. We went outside the walls one night, and there was nothing—just bush and darkness. Some people had flares out there, maybe 30 or 40 of them, probably all tourists. We heard this incredible animal sound and a completely naked man came out of the pitch black—he had long, dreadlocked hair and a long beard, a sort of wildman—and he was making this amazing noise. We formed a wide ring around him and he jabbered away, apparently asking for a volunteer. I felt this push in my back and he grabbed hold of me and pulled me into the centre of the circle. He then put something on my head and backed off, still making this extraordinary noise.

What he was doing was calling the hyenas. This enormous hyena



emerged from the black and ate whatever it was off the top of my head—I assume it must have been dried meat. And then wandered off again. I imagine my dad knew what was going to happen, but I certainly didn't. It was very frightening but absolutely fantastic and certainly had a lot to do with the kind of total theatre I ended up making: a big visual world, music and action. Still, I assume the wild-man did his thing regularly for the entertainment of the tourists. For all I know, he had a Bentley parked round the corner.

"Hergé's Adventures of Tintin", directed by Rufus Norris is at the Playhouse, London WC2, December 6th to January 12th www.tintintheshow.co.uk

SIOBHAN REDMOND, ACTOR

I was always being taken to the theatre. Both my parents loved it. My father lectured in English and drama and my mum was a very gifted amateur actor and director. I'm reliably informed that I enjoyed interfering with most performances—I was no respecter of the fourth wall. The first thing I saw would have been "Peter Pan" at the King's Theatre, Glasgow. After that, my sister and I were always taken to see Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre Company. It was a series of little sketches and skits and songs. Bertha would always come to the front of the stage behind the tabs, stick her face through and say "Item number...?" And we'd all shriek, "One!" or "Two!" or "Three!"

I developed a taste for high art very early on. I remember my sister, with no front teeth, crocheting her way through "Hamlet" at the Glasgow Citizens and saying "What's wrong with him anyway?" And me saying, "He's very sad because his dad's dead." And her saying, "Oh really—what's so terrible about that?"

SIR CHRISTOPHER ONDAATJE, AUTHOR AND EXPLORER

I'd just left school for good. It was the summer of 1951. My mother was then living in Wimbledon, so I stayed with her, and she forced my sister and me to get the early train to queue outside St James's Theatre in the West End. She liked to see everything there was to see. The afternoon performance was Shaw's "Caesar and Cleopatra", with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. The evening performance was Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra", again with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.

We got tickets right up high in the gods, and we saw these two incredible performances. The young Vivien Leigh was the most gorgeous sex kitten: you couldn't help but notice it. But I also remember Cleopatra's handmaiden, Ftatateeta, who was played by Elspeth March, Stewart Granger's first wife. She was a big woman and dominated the stage. She was most humorous—I was fascinated by her. Afterwards we hacked our way back to Wimbledon to complete a long, tiring and marvellous day. It was beyond my wildest dreams. I've never seen anything so dramatic since.

TAMARA ROJO, PRINCIPAL DANCER, ROYAL BALLET

We saw "Swan Lake", by some Russian company, in Madrid. This was after I'd begun to learn ballet: I'd start at five, after I was invited in to watch a ballet class to get out of the cold.

There wasn't an orchestra—the music was taped—and I didn't know who the main character was. Then the dancing started, the blue light appeared and the people became kind of shiny—they were wearing white, of course, so they had a kind of iridescence. But the theatre itself was slightly greasy, and the carpets were sticky. What I loved about ballet at that point was the cleanness of it. At the school, everything was very tidy and the teacher smelled very nice. The barres, the mirrors, the white walls—it had a calm, clean quality. So I was rather disappointed to find that you could do ballet in such an awful place. ■

WINTER WONDERS: THE BEST OF THIS SEASON

"The Flint Street Nativity" Adults play children playing Mary'n'Joseph, to great comic effect *Liverpool Playhouse www.everymanplayhouse.com*

"Kirikou & Karaba" Stylish, unsentimental musical based on an African folktale *Casino de Paris, France. www.casinodeparis.fr*

"The Nutcracker" The original Christmas treat, in its natural home *Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow www.bolshoi.ru*

"Tom's Midnight Garden" Back again, an acclaimed production of the classic time-slip story *Manchester Library Theatre www.librarytheatre.com*

"War Horse" Emotional equine puppetry *RNT, London www.nationaltheatre.org.uk*

MEMOIRS OF A NOBODY

Nick Hornby set the ball rolling. Now JASPER REES has joined the club

A FEW YEARS ago I was working on a biography of Arsène Wenger, the cerebral coach of Arsenal. One of the people I interviewed was the famous Arsenal fan Nick Hornby. Afterwards I produced a first edition of "Fever Pitch" and asked him to sign it. Signed first editions of the book that made Hornby's name are gold dust. "Fever Pitch" sold well over a million in Britain, but initially it had a modest print run. Why wouldn't it? The autobiography of someone who had done precisely nothing to excite the interest of the reading public was an entirely new concept in publishing.

"Of course," said Hornby, turning to the title page. "Would you like me to just sign it, or sign it to you?"

This sounded like a trick question.

"There's no way of putting this diplomatically, Jasper. If I just sign it the value of the book will go up. If I sign it to you..." The sentence didn't need finishing. In the NASDAQ of literary value, Hornby was saying as delicately as possible, he was a somebody. I, however, was a nobody. I didn't want to suggest to him that my only motive might be improper, so I did myself out of several hundred pounds and asked him to sign it to me.

But somewhere in the netherworld of my unconscious, was I secretly calculating that one day I too would be a somebody? We all dream of telling our life story. The brilliant conjuring trick of "Fever Pitch" was that in measuring out his life in football fixtures its author told everyone else's life story too. In this country the book single-handedly minted a brand new genre—the nonentity memoir. Its success flashed a green light at a lurking army of authors all itching to tell the world about the new holy trinity: me, myself and, last but not least, I.

At first it was mostly journalists. Previously they might have thought of funnelling their experiences into fiction, but the new literary market allowed them to stick to the facts. They wrote about their failure as a pop star, failure as a boxing promoter, or, in Toby Young's case, failure to take Manhattan. His "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People" won 250,000 friends worldwide and next autumn it follows "Fever Pitch" into the multiplex—the ultimate affirmation of arrival. Where conventional autobiographies are about the rise to the top, these were tales of bumping along the bottom. Failure was the new rock'n'roll. Which explains why there have been an awful lot of golf memoirs.

None of this happened in a vacuum. Outside the bookshop, popular culture was enfranchising nobodies to share the contents of their navel through talk radio, reality television and—the most emetic, self-promoting medium of all—blogs. The logical outcome, a decade or so in, was to detach celebrity from ability sufficiently for an absolute zero called Chantelle—or to give her her scientific name, Dolly the Celeb—to

LESS FAME, MORE WIT: RECOMMENDED MEMOIRS

The Sorcerer's Apprentice by John Richardson (1999) Picasso's biographer recalls his 20s peering behind the Cubist curtain. A sinfully entertaining read about queeny strops and priapic misdemeanours raises scurrilous gossip to the status of art

Lost in Music by Giles Smith (1995). A pop obsessive from Colchester hilariously fails to hit the big time. Wit, humility and seamlessly crafted prose are not very rock'n'roll, but ensure this book stands aside from most pop literature

The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl by Belle de Jour (2004) Pseudonymous proof that it is possible to write un-toe-curlingly about sex. Rumours persist that this tart with some art is actually a professional writer who made it all up. It's that good

sprout from the test tube, win "Celebrity Big Brother" and immediately gush forth the *ne plus ultra* of pointless autobiographies, entitled "Living the Dream".

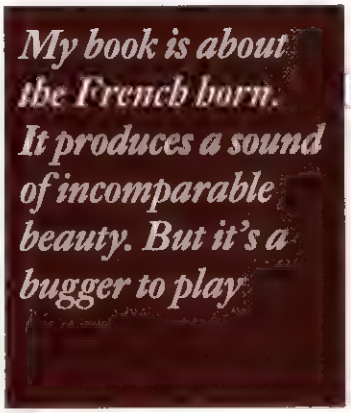
A culture that entitles "real" people to the limelight was sooner or later going to give birth to the sexual memoir. Naturally the lead came from France. Catherine Millet's "The Sexual Life of Catherine M", a catalogue of joyless promiscuity, sold globally in its hundreds of thousands and prompted a gaggle of cliterati fluent in the argot of "Sex and the City" to bare all in titles like "Girl with a One-track Mind: Confessions of the Seductress Next Door". Sex is notoriously difficult to write about with conviction, so when a prostitute trading under the pseudonym of Belle de Jour produced, in "The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl", a stylish account of her night job which sold over 200,000 copies, she was widely assumed to have made it all up. But she can't have done. It's proper novelists who get erotica wrong, so much so that Britain's *Literary Review* presents a Bad Sex Award to the year's worst perpetrator in fiction.

Just as sex has set up camp on the three-for-two table, so has death. It started when an HIV-positive journalist, Oscar Moore, kept a diary in the *Guardian* of his journey to an early grave. Two more journalists, John Diamond and Ruth Picardie, followed suit with moving dispatches from the chemotherapy front-line, posthumously collected into books which unleashed a torrent of cancer-related memoirs. However pure the authors' motives, these books leapt off the shelves for the same reason that people slow down to gawp at car crashes.

In the wake of "Angela's Ashes", Frank McCourt's memoir of a grim Irish childhood that spawned a trilogy and a movie, the publishing industry was quick to latch on to the commercial potential of childhood trauma. The *New York Times* was moved to describe Dave Pelzer's relentless commodification of his own abuse as "dysfunction for dollars" as authors queued up to retrieve similar memories. The formulaic titles hinted at the corporate cynicism that attended their publication: "Damaged", "Punished", "Abandoned", "Please, Daddy, No", "Tell Me Why, Mummy", "Don't Tell Mummy", "Don't Ever Tell". In a recent cartoon in the *New Yorker* a woman brandishes a letter at a man. "Congratulations!" she says. "Your manuscript was the one-millionth personal memoir submitted to us this year."

And so to the million and first—written, I almost blush to admit, by me. Without wishing to put anyone off, there is no sex or death or even illness in my life story. There is, however, a narrative I hope readers can identify with. I was taught at school never to use the word "I" in essays, and in journalism I've more or less stuck to it. Never having entertained the slightest ambition to write about myself, I found the idea stealing up on me on the cusp of my 40th birthday, no doubt a symptom of some sort of midlife rethink, when I decided on a whim to answer the beating of my heart and pick up the musical instrument I'd put down on leaving school.

The French horn is directly descended from man's first instrument. Its ancestor destroyed the walls of Jericho and struck fear into Rome's enemies. It made its way indoors from the hunting fields of France to take its place at the heart of the 19th-century orchestra until eventually it was adopted by Hollywood and the Beatles. It produces a sound of incomparable beauty. But it's a bugger to play. Despite having severely limited ability, I stupidly set myself a daunting target: to stand up in 12 months' time and play a Mozart concerto.



I was emboldened to write about what happened next by meeting many people who had expressed a similar longing. I also met some who thought they were being helpful when they said, "You must read X's personal memoir about pianos" or "Do you know Y's done something similar on the electric guitar?" I've become aware that this isn't the first story of a nobody with a musical theme. But it's my story, and like other memoirs by people you've never heard of, its aim is to tell a tale that is at once familiar and original. In alighting on the common experience of learning an instrument, and describing the nightmare-come-true of performing in front of a paying audience, I hope I've done both. So should I just sign your first edition, or should I sign it to you? ■

"I Found My Horn"
by Jasper Rees is published by Weidenfeld on January 10th

THE VISUAL CV *Daniel Barenboim*

Daniel Barenboim is going back to Beethoven's piano sonatas. RICHARD MORRISON picks the highlights from a formidable career

1950 Danny boy, the seven-year-old son of two Russian-Jewish pianists who had emigrated to Argentina, plays his first public piano recital, in Buenos Aires. The programme consists of ferocious Prokofiev pieces, followed by a string of dazzling encores. Already he is an eager-to-please over-achiever. Fifty years later he would repeat the concert. "A good musician", he said, "always returns to the scene of his first crime."

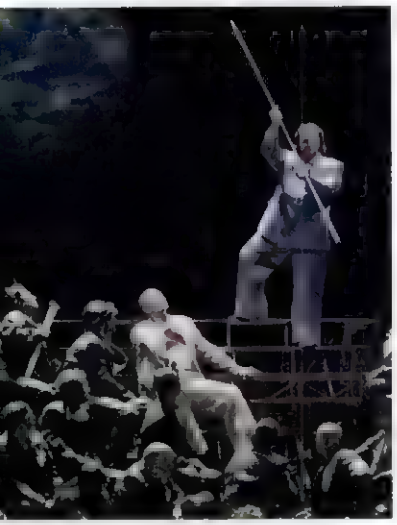
1964 Barenboim strikes up an instant rapport with the English Chamber Orchestra, and wins over London audiences by directing exuberant, seemingly carefree performances of piano concertos from the keyboard. He and his chums, the polio-stricken virtuoso Itzhak Perlman, the violinist Pinchas Zukerman and the conductor Zubin Mehta, are seen as the highbrow answer to Frank Sinatra's rat pack, redefining classical music for a new generation. They style themselves "the kosher nostra"

1954 Wilhelm Furtwängler, the German maestro, declares the 11-year-old Barenboim "a phenomenon". (Perhaps not coincidentally, Barenboim reveres Furtwängler above all other conductors from that day onwards.) By now the boy prodigy is in Salzburg, studying conducting as well as the piano. At 17, he astonishes the musical world by performing all 32 Beethoven piano sonatas in quick succession. From memory, naturally

1966 At a Christmas party Barenboim meets a brilliant English cellist, Jacqueline du Pré. He is 24, she 21. The attraction is mutual, instant and impassioned, and they marry a year later. Over the next six years, with Barenboim conducting or playing the piano, du Pré will make a series of recordings of unparalleled intensity. *Time* magazine calls it "one of the most remarkable relationships that music has known since Clara and Robert Schumann"

1973 Preparing to go on stage in New York, du Pré cannot control her muscles. Multiple sclerosis is diagnosed. Her career is over, and her health deteriorates until her death 14 years later. Shattered, Barenboim supports her financially, but seeks private solace with a Russian pianist, Elena Bashkirova, whom he marries after du Pré dies. They have two sons

1989 Barenboim's woes are compounded when he is appointed to run Paris's glittering new Opera Bastille, but is spectacularly fired before the curtain rises His fat cat contract—£700,000 for four months' work—becomes public knowledge. Dozens of classical-music luminaries sign a telegram of protest to President Mitterrand, but Barenboim isn't reinstated Humiliated and ridiculed, he seems washed-up

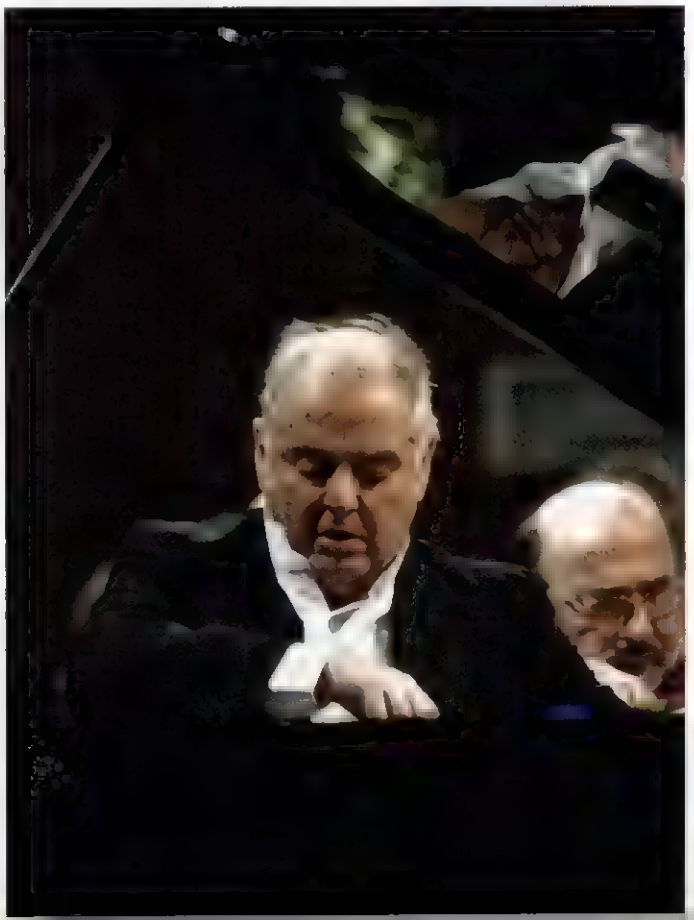


1998 Claudio Abbado's resignation as boss of the Berlin Philharmonic triggers a race for the world's top conducting job It comes down to two horses: Barenboim, and the mop-haired English upstart, Sir Simon Rattle. Rattle, the breath of fresh air, gets the players' vote. Barenboim, bruised again, decides he will conduct all ten Wagner operas in a year at the Staatsoper a headline-grabbing move widely seen as a two-fingered salute to the orchestra down the road

1991 Defying the sceptics, the golden boy rises again. He succeeds Solti as music director of arguably America's best orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Two years later, he is appointed music director of the Staatsoper in Berlin, with a mandate to revive the glory days of this once-lustrous theatre in the reunified city

1999 With his Palestinian friend, Edward Said, Barenboim hatches an amazing plan a summer-school orchestra, with young Israelis and Arabs practising side by side and spending their evenings discussing cultural differences The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra wows crowds across Europe, then, in 2005, performs in Ramallah on the West Bank. Zionists call Barenboim, an Israeli citizen, a traitor

2001 Further anger in Israel as Barenboim slips the prelude to "Tristan und Isolde" into an Israel Festival concert as an unprogrammed encore, defying the longstanding taboo about playing Wagner (Hitler's favourite composer) on Israeli turf When confronted with objections, he declares: "Wagner was not responsible for Auschwitz". After more than 50 years, Danny remains the most talked-about kid on the classical block



2007 Daniel Barenboim is to play all 32 of Beethoven's piano sonatas at the Royal Festival Hall, London, starting on January 28th www.southbankcentre.co.uk

THE PLAYLIST

Some great songs never appear on lists of great songs. TIM DE LISLE picks 12

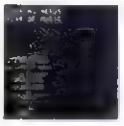
FOR A REBELLIOUS art form, rock music can be quite conventional. And one of the rules states that lists of great songs shall look much the same from decade to decade. Bohemian Rhapsody, Satisfaction, Hey Jude, Hotel California, Like A Rolling Stone ... It's not that they don't deserve it. It's just that a hundred other great songs do too. So let's unhook the velvet rope and allow this lot through the doors. ■

What are your favourite unrecognised songs? Let us know at www.moreintelligentlife.com

CRAZY *Gnarls Barkley*
The perfect pop (and soul, and rock) song: moving, stirring, swinging but not wearing

TIPITINA *Professor Longhair*
The essence of New Orleans: ramshackle piano brilliance. Search for the Prof on YouTube and you can see him play the song, in a sky-blue velour shirt.

SOUND & VISION *David Bowie*
Bowie gets strangely short shrift from list compilers. "Heroes" often makes it, deservedly, but this song, from "Low", is just as magical: strange, glassy, funky and tremendously confident, with its 87-second intro. The production, by Tony Visconti and Brian Eno, is perfect, as Franz Ferdinand found when they bravely tried a cover version



HEAVEN *Talking Heads*
Another Eno production. Musically, it's soulful country; lyrically, it's sharply urbane.

GENIUS OF LOVE *Tom Tom Club*
The dynamite synth riff has been recognised by DJs and hip-hop artists, but the song as a whole is undervalued

KILLING ME SOFTLY WITH HIS SONG *Roberta Flack*
"Strumming my pain with his fingers..." Hard to say which is better, the precision of the words, or the way she sings them.

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE *the Beatles*
One of the few underrated Beatles songs: a sublime little ballad by Paul McCartney

I WANT YOU *Elvis Costello*
A simple blues swells into a gripping, twisted love song.

FATHER AND SON *Johnny Cash with Fiona Apple*
Cat Stevens's youthful gem gets even better in the magisterial hands of the elderly Cash. The moment when Apple arrives, one minute in, is heart-rending.

TOTAL CONTROL *the Motels*
A crisp rhythm, a rudimentary beat, a raunchy voice and some gorgeous pacing: a high-water mark of the New Wave.

MOST OF THE TIME *Bob Dylan*
Sad, subtle and beautifully crafted: probably his best song of the past 30 years

TOWER OF SONG *Leonard Cohen*
The cleverest of all songs about songs, this stately manifesto also deals deftly with ageing. "I ache in the place where I used to play," Cohen sings. That was in 1988. Interviewing him a few years later, I asked him how those places felt now. He replied, with gloomy relish: "I can't even locate them."

To download these songs, either individually or together open iTunes on your screen, go to music store, click on iMix, and enter *Intelligent Life* Playlist in the search box. As we went to press, the Beatles were not yet on iTunes, but they were not expected to hold out much longer

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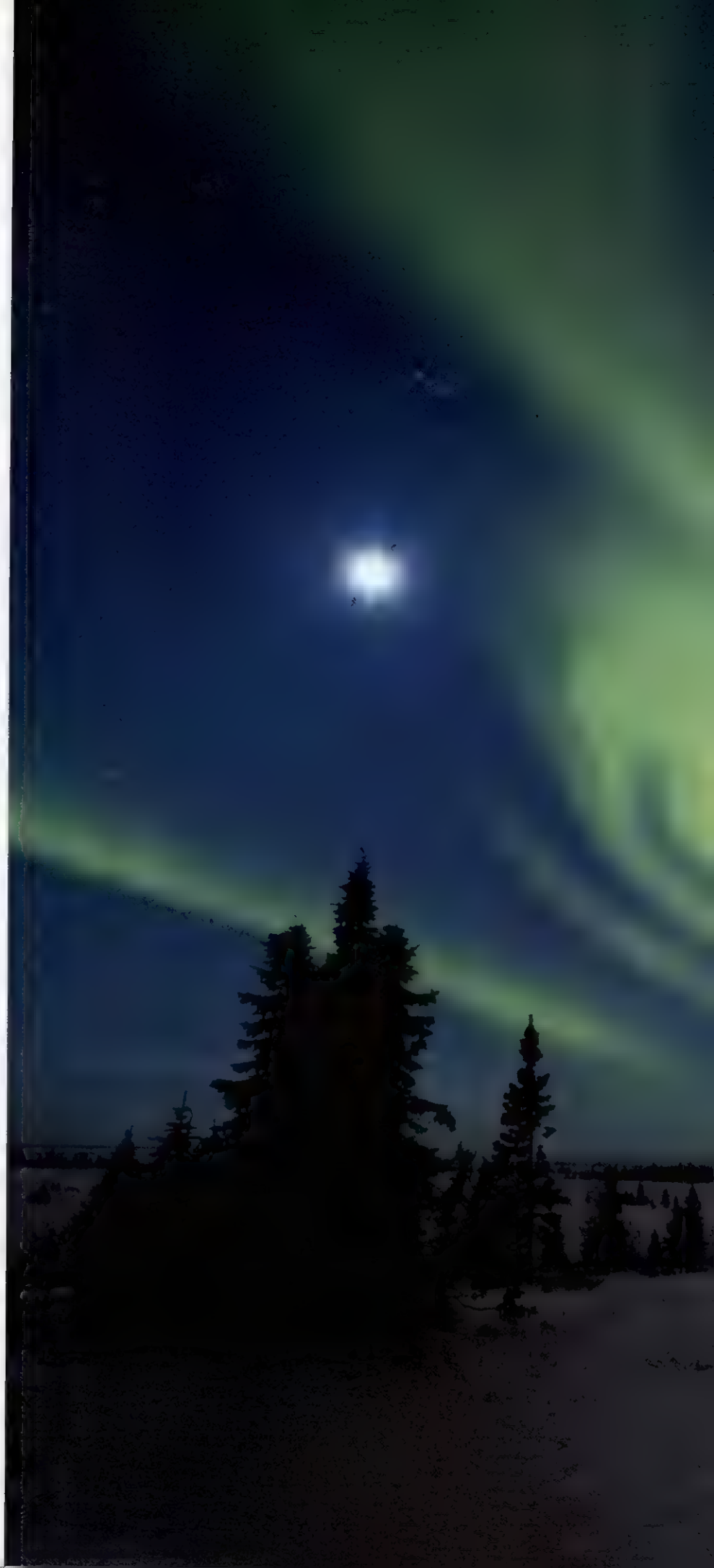
SNAPSHOT

The Northern Lights

These celestial light displays, seen here in Manitoba, Canada, gave Philip Pullman a book title (see page 63) and have long featured in the folklore of northern peoples. The Finnish name for them translates as "fox fires"—according to legend, foxes made of fire lived in Lapland and the northern lights were whipped up by their tails. The Algonquin tribe believed the lights to be their ancestors dancing around a ceremonial fire, and the Inuit held that they were the spirits of the dead playing football with a skull across the sky. The scientific explanation is that they come from electric currents created when the solar wind blows through the Earth's magnetic field. The currents shed their energy to gases in the atmosphere and the gases emit the captured energy as light—the greenish and reddish glow is from oxygen, the purple and blue from nitrogen. It was Galileo who came up with the name Aurora Borealis; today scientists watch the light show for clues about global warming. ~ REBECCA WILLIS



PLACES

OUT THERE *Glamping*

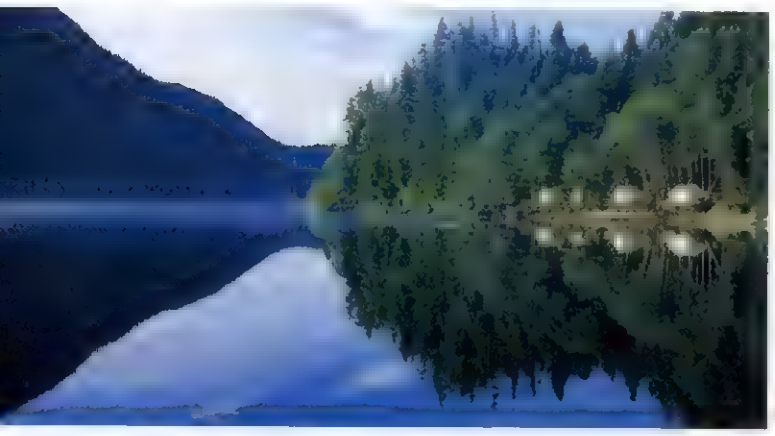
Glamorous camping is all the rage. REBECCA WILLIS explores the appeal of a holiday in a tent, or at least something that looks like one

Times have changed since camping was for boy scouts and tents were always khaki-coloured. Life under canvas has gone mainstream: Glastonbury is a sea of pretty Cath Kidston tents and you can buy yurts on eBay. The word "glamping" has been coined (a contraction of "glamorous camping") and the travel industry is peddling the concept of "eco-luxury" as if it weren't an oxymoron

This winter the **One & Only Le Saint Géran** (www.OneandOnlyLeSaintGeran.com) on Mauritius provides the perfect emblem of our eco-chic times: it has placed a picturesque teepee, designed by Alice Temperley, on a sandy peninsula near the hotel. This can be used as a beach cabana or for spa treatments. You can even get married in it. But at night you go back to your five-star hotel room

The dictionary definition of "tent" begins "a portable shelter...", but nowadays it's the guests who move around not the tents, even on safari. The Happy Valley set might raise an eyebrow if they could see the **Bateleur Camp at Kichwa Tembo** (www.kichwatembo.com) in Kenya's bush, complete with a lap pool and nine tents with en-suite bathrooms, and butlers

The tent has been influential in hotel design in part because of its traditional origins and its low-impact, back-to-nature associations, but also because of its aesthetic appeal. Who wouldn't prefer a lofty, romantic, outdoor structure to an anonymous hotel room? Combine that with our love of luxury and the result is a clutch of hotels with tents, more honestly called "tented rooms", that are destinations in themselves

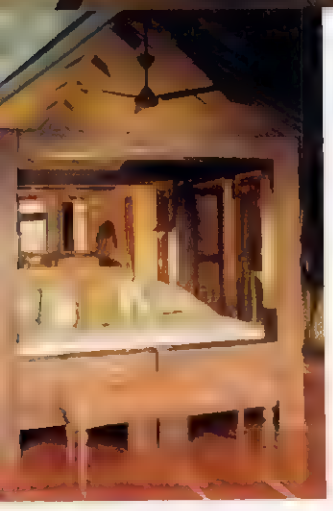


Clayoquot Wilderness Resort is a sea-plane ride from Vancouver, over the Gulf Islands to Victoria Island's Pacific coast. Set in a "fragile biosphere", it promises "soft beds and soft adventure". The 27 guest tents offer the "delicious paradox" of indulgence in a remote and untamed wilderness. www.wildretreat.com

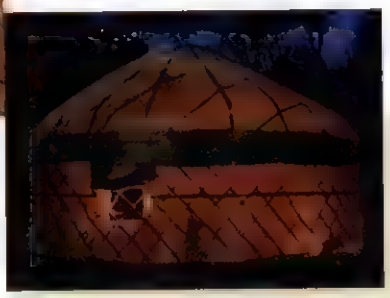
Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle is reached by river boat through bamboo jungles in the far north of Thailand. There are 15 "tented accommodations" with large outdoor decks and hand-hammered copper bathtubs. You can go elephant mahout training or sit and drink in the bar-on-stilts. www.fourseasons.com/goldentriangle

Voyages Longitude 131° is set on a sand dune in the Australian desert. The 30 guests wake up to the sun rising over Uluru (Ayers Rock), and probably never forget it. The "tents" have white domed roofs with flowing fabric that creates "the illusion of camping". www.longitude131.com.au

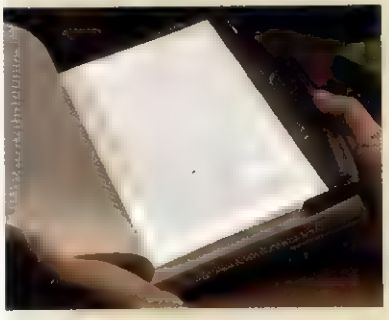
Amanwana, on the remote Indonesian island of Moyo, made headlines when it opened in 1993—partly because Princess Di came to hide, but also because of the innovative rooms: 20 air-conditioned tents, each 58 square metres. These are actually solid structures with a separate canvas interior, set on the beach in a tropical forest. You can hear the wild boar rootling outside at night. www.amanresorts.com



Aman-i-Khás, another Amanresort, is on the edge of Rajasthan's Ranthambhore National Park, a wildlife sanctuary. You lie on cushions around the fire and listen to the calls of the wild. The ten canopied rooms are "reminiscent of the travelling tents enjoyed during the resplendent Moghul dynasty". www.amanresorts.com



YURTS For an earthier, greener and cheaper experience, there are yurt holidays in Wales, Devon and Cornwall (of the bring-your-own-sleeping-bags variety). Canvas Chic has 12 family-sized yurts in an oak forest in the Ardèche; there are also four communal cooking tents for you to prepare your food. www.canvaschic.com



BEST CAMPING GADGET For reading in bed the head torch is not a flattering accessory. Try instead the Light-Wedge which casts a panel of light on the page you are reading and doesn't disturb your bedfellow (can also be useful at home). www.alexlight.com

BEING THERE

Washington Alphabet

To fall in love with the Capitol city, REBECCA NICOLSON finds you need a new lexicon

MY DAUGHTER HAS been reading Dr Seuss's "On Beyond Zebra", which is about the letters that exist outside the boring old 26 we all know. "The old alphabet isn't enough," he writes. And after 18 months in the American capital, I've found that navigating life here requires more than the "A to Z" that I used back home in London. The place names are deceptively familiar and the critique is well-worn—it will not surprise anyone to hear that Americans drive on the right and serve food in big portions. Less well known are the subtle pleasures to discover beyond "zee".

My first few weeks saw travel narrow my mind as the "inner burbs" of Washington, DC, closed around me. The capital of the most powerful nation in the world could not have been more depressing if it had been Reading. I had arrived in the United States with two young children and a suitcase full of off-the-peg European prejudice about the country—too big for its boots—and the people—often too big for their XXL shirts. And at first these prejudices seemed to fit.

This is the land which grows the corn which makes the syrup which soaks their food which fattens their bottoms. "You still working on that?" asks the waitress, who says she is here to help. I tell her that eating is not a job. She doesn't understand.

This is the town where men dress in shorts with belts. And socks.

This is the strangely square capital city where George Bush lives and where I cannot walk my daughter to school because the pavement inexplicably runs out half-way there.

So we drive (yes, on the right) and, I ask myself every morning, why do American cars have indicators? They are never used. No one changes lane without an angry palm being pressed on the horn of the car behind.

Here, a Stop sign means Stop. For a minimum of three seconds. Otherwise you can be pulled over by a scary armed policeman and get a $50 ticket. Rules are observed, strictly and it often feels pointlessly, in the land of the free.

You can only park if the car is pointed in a certain direction. Mecca? Minneapolis? I get put on the tow truck, even though I'm still sitting inside. The driving is passive, then aggressive. An old lady in her relatively small car glides, expressionless, into my stationary jeep and starts screaming at me.

And then there is the contented goodytwoshoeness of this Southern town; prudes who can't bear to see nudity even when the body in question belongs to a one-year-old baby. Why can't

TRAFFIC IN GEORGETOWN AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

I say "fuck" or buy a bottle of wine on Sunday? "Which church do I go to?" None! Children are told to refer to me as Mrs Rebecca. It feels like the 1950s, even down to the black people who are, in effect, still segregated by education and economics, if no longer by law.

But what is it that Dr Seuss says? "So, on beyond Z! It's high time you were shown/That you really don't know all there is to be known." I decided I really must try harder to get past the small print of everyday life. And, no matter how thick my haze of irritation, it lifts in a few minutes' drive through Rock Creek Park, a strange, 1,700 acre sub-tropical forest which runs mile after mile through the middle of the city.

A bit further and kids are kayaking through rapids on the Potomac, marathon runners are training along the canal. Driving on, I hit Virginia's hunting country which looks like England is supposed to, but never does. Then civil-war battlefields, Manassas, Fredericksburg, Shenandoah Valley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and eventually the sinister Appalachians, setting for many a spooky movie.

Within a hour of central DC, you can drive to Middleburg. The town, established in 1787, is an American version of Moreton-in-Marsh. There are a couple of inns, green-welly shops and pot pourri outlets. Twee, maybe, but the surrounding countryside, which stretches and rolls right up into the Blue Ridge Mountains, is gorgeous.

The civil war shed much of its blood near here. Manassas National Battlefield Park is an easy 40-minute drive from the city centre. The national park has preserved the ground where at least 3,000 lives were lost.

For a "don't know what to do with the kids" day, drive into Maryland and visit Wheaton Regional Park, 500 acres with train rides, ice-skating, a carousel and horse-back riding.

Past "zee" and, back in DC, I find things that before I did not see. Pristine playgrounds, civilised empty roads, large detached clapperboard houses, a distinctly un-European cleanliness, museums built on a scale designed to rival Stalin: the National Gallery of Art, for instance, is a rich maze and merits at least a year of weekly visits. There is, if you look closely, anything you want. Almost. Organic farmers' markets; cheap—slightly frumpy—clothes, and a vast, if as yet unexplored, range of dermatological treatments.

The weather here has the power to amaze. A soft spring matures into the big American summer heat, with its mosquitoes, thunderstorms and family rows around the lido. Then "fall" with chocolate, copper, Raspberry Ripple leaves (so that's what the fuss is about), and trick-or-treat and rain so heavy it knocks down trees. A foot of snow is dumped on us overnight, then ice storms turn Washington into a toboggan track for my reckless daughter when school is cancelled because it's a "snow day"—or three. Here children still have a childhood.

Beyond "zee". There is a gentleness, generosity and optimism to suburban America that shames the shrill, sneering voice in me. The time and space of this continent opens up the soul, even a jaundiced one such as mine, still infected by our own crowded island. Our lovely neighbours let the kids help in the garden, answering a thousand questions with patience. The Americans, at least those inhabiting their capital, don't judge or look for fault, so why should we? Beyond "zee", beyond "DC", there's a whole New World out there. ■

FACT BOX

Our Kids: a weekly online newsletter that provides an essential guide to all child activities—if only all cities had the same www.our-kids.com

2 Amys: the best pizzas. *3715 Macomb St NW Tel. 202 885 5700*

Old Ebbitt Grill: everyone's favourite for traditional grill food *675 15th St NW Tel 202 347 4800*

Makoto: the number one sushi restaurant, which is tiny but utterly delicious. *4822 MacArthur Blvd NW Tel 202 298 6866*

Black Salt: one of the best fish restaurants *4883 MacArthur Blvd NW Tel 202 342 9101*

La Fourchette: French food in the lively Adams Morgan area *2429 18th St NW Tel. 202 332 3077*

The Hunters Head: drive out for lunch to see the Fall *9048 John St Mosby Hwy, Upperville, VA 20184 Tel. 540 592 9020*

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Dupont Circle Farmers Market: every Sunday 9am-1pm, expensive but worth it. *20th St, between Massachusetts Ave and Q St* www.freshfarmmarket.org

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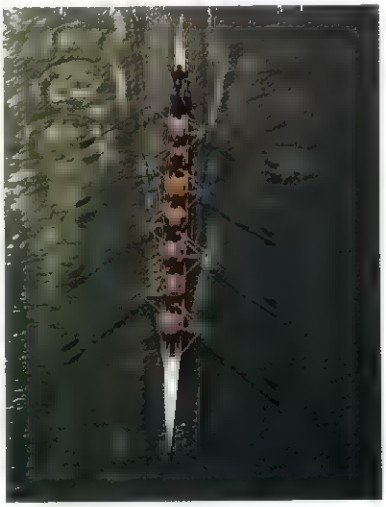

ABOVE ROWING ON THE POTOMAC

MONUMENT: GETTY IMAGES GEORGETOWN: TRAVEL LOUNGE ROWING: ALAMY

Terra Cognita

What does it mean to be an explorer in a world where everything has been explored? Ben Saunders tells JOANNE RAMOS why he loads up his sled and heads for the Poles—and how it leaves him a bit empty inside

THE NORTH POLE, Earth's northernmost point, sits not on land but in the middle of the Arctic Ocean. To get there, you must traverse hundreds of miles across sea ice that is, in many places, jagged with pressure ridges—towering heaps of broken ice blocks—and cut by fissures in the ice that can be so long and wide you must swim across them. Temperatures can plunge below -60°C. And, always, there is the danger of falling through thin ice into the deep, cold sea below.

Only a handful of explorers have made it to the North Pole on foot. On a balmy, London night I sit in a basement room in the Lloyd's building, all stainless steel and glass, waiting for one of them to give a talk. Ben Saunders, an energetic, 30-year-old Briton, claims to be the fourth person to ski unsupported to the North Pole and the youngest to do so solo. He set out in 2004 with three strangers who agreed to split the cost of flights and other logistics. Only Saunders reached the Pole. One was rescued when he developed frostbite after falling through thin ice and another because of a broken ankle. The third, a Frenchwoman, was never found.

The room I sit in was once the library in the original Lloyd's building, moved here panel by panel. Oil paintings of ships ploughing through the seas line the dark oak walls. It is a throwback to an age when the world was young, and befits tales of derring-do and adventure. Now that the world is older and known, I wonder, what are today's young explorers exploring?

Saunders is speaking to a gathering of financiers. Giving speeches sustains him between expeditions, as it has many explorers before him. It also pays for his team (managers for public-relations and sponsorships, a training coach, an assistant). Tonight he has waived his fee in the hope that the sponsor of his next expedition is sitting in the audience.

He is introduced as a "polar explorer" and the "next Ranulph Fiennes". Fiennes was the first man to visit both the North and South poles by land and the first to cross Antarctica on foot. A picture of Saunders appears on a large screen, his blue eyes peering from behind an ice-encrusted balaclava.

He repeats the story he told me earlier in the week. But here it feels simpler and punchier, and much more entertaining. Saunders, too, is new. Offstage he is mild-mannered, with an easy laugh and a habit of fusing together words in his rush to follow a thought. Conversations with him are peppered by Wow! Epic! Brilliant! He is confident, but full of questions about his life's path.

The explorer before me, in his well-cut suit, is a showman—cocksure and smooth. He tells of the failure of his virgin expedition, an attempt to reach the North Pole in 2001 with an experienced polar adventurer, Pen Hadow. He develops frostbite in his toes early on; they meet a polar bear; their food runs short (Saunders loses 30 pounds in eight weeks). He returns home after being picked up two-thirds of the way to the Pole, "feeling like a total failure".

Then comes that solo expedition to the North Pole. He swims in his drysuit across "inky black water over three miles deep—the scariest thing I've ever done"; he sledges for hours only to find, checking his GPS at the end of the day, that he is more than two miles behind his position that morning. The constantly shifting sea ice has drifted against him. In the finale, he reaches the North Pole—alone in an area one and a half times the size of America. He ends on an uplifting note: "I am not an explorer in the Edwardian sense. The maps have been drawn. But I see myself as exploring human possibilities. I did something many think is impossible." The implication: so can you.

I had found his story more convincing when he told it to me in his cluttered flat a few days earlier, popping up frequently to show me the binding on his well-worn, blue skis or jabbering excitedly about expedition diets. But now, the financiers are enthralled and at the end he is surrounded by a knot of admirers eager to shake his hand. >

BEN SAUNDERS ON THE TRANSARCTIC EXPEDITION
MARCH 2004

> It is the day after Saunders's talk at Lloyd's. We are standing on a dirt path in Richmond Park, where Saunders often trains for his expeditions. I ask him about his status as an explorer, and his normally direct gaze becomes hard to catch. "I think the word 'explorer' needs reinventing," he says slowly. "I shied away from it for a long time because...it conjures up a colonial, chest-thumping image." He thinks for a moment, then continues, "but there is something to it. It's more than adventuring...To me that sounds like bungee jumping, an adrenaline kick. And 'athletics' only captures one side of it...But the world's mapped. It's about human possibilities, really." He rushes out this last sentence, an echo from his speech at Lloyd's the previous night, as if only half convinced.

Saunders runs on this path and cycles or roller-skis on the paved road ringing the park. He has started training 30 hours a week for a return solo trip on foot to the North Pole in March. He wants to break the record held by Robert Peary, who in 1909 reached the Pole in 37 days using dog sleds.

Saunders has been an avid cyclist since he was 12, when he would take "epic" bike rides through the woodlands around his home in Devon. He has run several marathons, including two "ultra-marathons"—40 miles and 58 miles, respectively—and he often competes in duathalons (a long run, a bike ride, another run).

For him, the mental challenge is as important as the physical one. "You are fighting yourself, really...Part of you always wants to quit," he says. After falling through ice in 2004, he remembers being shaken and ready to give up. "It is so tough that you are always looking for an excuse to stop and call for rescue. But of course you can't. So you carry on."

Saunders added a second North Pole expedition to his schedule after his magnum opus—an expedition called, simply, "South"—was postponed until next October because he hasn't been able to raise the money. South would take him across Antarctica to the South Pole and back, a journey of 1,800 miles that he plans to ski solo and without "support"—no dogs, kites or vehicles and without resupply. This means he will haul everything for the four-month trip (in 2004 his sledge weighed almost 400 pounds). It would be the longest unsupported trek in history. Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian, is the only other to have done this, but used dog sleds. Critics snipe that Saunders—with GPS and satellite phones—can hardly be called unsupported. "It will be epic!" Saunders says.

Explorers have long captured the human imagination. During the "heroic age" of exploration in the early 20th century, Western countries competed to send the first man to the Poles. The race between Robert Falcon Scott, a Briton, and Amundsen to reach the South Pole in the early 1900s was a public spectacle. When news of Scott's death reached Britain—he arrived at the Pole in 1912 only to discover Amundsen had just beaten him there, before dying from cold and hunger miles from base camp—he became a national hero, his diary a bestseller. Schools and streets were named after him. Heroism also awaited Sir Edmund Hillary, after he and Tenzing Norgay became the first men to reach the summit of Everest, and Neil Armstrong, first man on the moon.

Today, exploration has become democratised. Cheap airfares, GPS, satellite phones and adventure outfits that, for a price, will take you out on the ice, up a mountain or even into space have made it easier and safer for ordinary folks to give it a go. From 2000 to 2006, 4,866 people tried to climb Everest, according to Explorersweb.com, a third of them on commercial expeditions. Even Antarctica, one of the most remote places in the world, has been flung open to adventurers. Next November, around a dozen teams will compete in the South Pole Race, touted by its organisers as the "first race to the South Pole since Scott and Amundsen's...nearly 100 years ago". This one, however, will be televised and participants will have full air- and ground-support and resupplies of food and fuel.

To the chagrin of purists, many such adventurers set themselves up as explorers. Squabbles frequently erupt over what makes an authentic "first"—including Saunders's 2004 expedition (warm weather meant there was much thin ice and open water on the Russian side of the Arctic, where Saunders set out for the Pole. He chose to have an aircraft deposit him where the ice was solid. Some believe only a start on land is legitimate. Saunders retorts that this is increasingly hard because of global warming). In any case, Saunders would rather talk about his charity work than get involved in arguments.

Shane Winser thinks charity work or other good causes are only part >

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BEN SAUNDERS PULLS HIS SLED ACROSS THE ARCTIC ICE

> of the reason people like Saunders do such things. As Geography Outdoors manager at the Royal Geographic Society (RGS) in London, she has been helping plan expeditions for more than 30 years. "Many adventurers have side programmes—a philanthropy or education," says Winser, a pleasant-faced woman with a bookish air. We are having lunch in a sunny room in the grandiose, 19th-century building that houses the RGS, just opposite Hyde Park. "In my more cynical moments, I think this is just a way to get a paid holiday. At other times, I think: a journey unshared is unlikely to have an impact."

Saunders and Winser go back, as Saunders remembers it, to when he visited the RGS at the age of 19 to get advice on an expedition and was, in his words, "brash and rather ego-centric". His plan was audacious: to ski to both Poles and climb Everest in one year. "I was laughed out of there—understandably," Saunders recalls good-naturedly. (Winser does not remember the meeting, although she says Saunders's lack of experience and funding back then would have made her "sceptical". She and Saunders are now friends.)

Winser accepts that adventurers can highlight issues like the environment. But she seems jaded by the parade of self-styled explorers marching through her doors. "Exploration must add to the existing body of knowledge," she says, observing how technology—satellites, submersibles—has helped make this possible.

Dan Bennett, president of the Explorers Club—the first men to both Poles, up Everest and to the moon are members—agrees that exploration must be "relevant". Scientific exploration falls into this category. Record-breaking does not. "I am not judging people," Bennett says carefully, "but merely repeating another person's first and doing it faster or...on a pogo stick—that is athletics, not exploration."

Bennett and I are in the lounge of the Explorers Club, an elegant mansion on New York's Upper East Side. A pair of enormous elephant tusks—one of many impressive artefacts bestowed on the club by its illustrious members—rises up from behind the leather chair Bennett sits on. I ask him: is a scientist an explorer who "discovers" from the comforts of the laboratory, but never gets into the field? He answers no, after admitting that the debate is unresolved at the club, "You have to get your hands dirty." When I posed the question to Winser in London, she, too, agreed an explorer must "be out there". But neither could articulate exactly why.

Explorers today, particularly non-scientists like Saunders, often feel the need to imbue their expeditions with "relevance"—by raising money for a charity or highlighting an issue such as global warming. Saunders's aim is to start a foundation to help poor children who "don't even know what the environment is" go on expeditions and learn about the natural world.

Saunders is a popular speaker at schools. Soon after we meet, he will give a talk at Ryde School, on the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England, to mark the opening of a new dormitory wing named in his honour. "The other wings", he says, abashed but proud, "are named after explorers, too: Scott, Shackleton—and Nansen!"

Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian, was the first person to cross the Arctic, in the late 1800s. He was also a scientist (one of the founders of neuron theory) and diplomat (he won the Nobel peace prize in 1922 for humanitarian services as a commissioner of the League of Nations). He is Saunders's hero. "He did what he did for the amazing adventure of it...And he was a renaissance man! I look up to people who have achieved in more than one field."

I ask why. Saunders says slowly, "Deep down, I guess I have this guilty feeling that what I am doing is completely pointless. I want...I need it to have...more meaning. Some purpose."

One of Saunders's Arctic mentors, Robert Swan, approves of this sen-

timent. The first person to walk to the North and South Poles, Swan is critical of self-proclaimed explorers who "puff themselves up and pretend they have made history when they haven't". He believes that exploration today, given the world's many ills, should be used to further a cause. (Swan, who is British and was awarded an OBE in 1995, runs a foundation dedicated to preserving the Antarctic wilderness.)

Swan, who spoke to me on the phone from Australia, thinks highly of Saunders, calling the "South" expedition "a definitive polar journey" and approving of Saunders's charitable goals and his unassuming nature. But Swan himself admits that what drove him to the Poles when he was 29 was a deep and fervent fascination with the Arctic and its history, "The motivation came from...wanting to make one small, irrelevant blip on the map of history."

Evolutionary biology hints at another possible reason. John Francis, a biologist with National Geographic, says there may be selective pressures that favour exploration and creativity. Most male mammals will travel away from home when they become juveniles in order to find mates other than their own relatives and avoid competing with their kin. It is also a way for them to expand into less-crowded territories with more abundant resources. "What do you eat next and where do you go to find it? Where can your offspring survive? These pressures encourage a certain level of inventiveness and what you could call exploration," says Francis.

Explorers, of course, are driven by a mix of more worldly concerns—money, patriotism, fame, science, philanthropy. In modern times, it is the loftier of these, the "relevant" ones, that tend to be trumpeted. In "The Worst Journey in the World" the youngest member of Scott's Antarctica expedition, Apsley Cherry-Garrard, compares their mission with Amundsen's: "We did not suffer from too little brains or daring: we may have suffered from too much. We were primarily a great scientific expedition, with the Pole as our bait for public support." The implication, embraced in the British press at the time, was that whereas Amundsen focused narrowly on being first to the Pole, Scott ventured south for science—a nobler cause. Hillary, the mountaineer, on the other hand once scoffed, "Nobody climbs mountains for scientific reasons. Science is used to raise money for the expeditions, but you really climb for the hell of it."

After lunch with Winser at the RGS, Saunders and I stroll to Hyde Park. He says his motives have changed from an egocentric urge to make a name for himself to "something more personal. In the end, only a handful of people will really appreciate what I'm doing and why..." He trails off, then says, "There is something about the scale of the challenges, of the place. It is...bizarrely addictive."

This comes at a cost. Although Saunders, with his successful speaking career, is at last on a stable financial footing, much of his recent life has been "desperate...enormous peaks and troughs. Scrambling to plan and finance and train for each expedition is all-consuming. Stressful...Then you are away and alone for months on end. It's what I love about it—the single-mindedness of it. But I am realising it is to the detriment of a lot of other stuff, whether that's properly moving into my flat"—his living room is still lined with unpacked boxes—"or friends or relationships or family." Saunders is single. One of his training partners for 2004 recently became a father of twins and no longer has time for gruelling runs.

A group of boisterous school children spills on to the lawn in front of us. I can barely hear Saunders over their shouts. "I don't know. I just don't know," he says, answering a question I have not posed. "It's something about the polar environment—the power of it. It draws me in. But—I'm hoping," he says and swings forward with hands clamped together, "I'm really hoping that I'll be happy after 'South'. That I can draw a line under it and say: that's enough of the big stuff."

■

SEVEN WONDERS

Ken Howard

Royal Academician and one of Britain's best-known artists, Ken Howard paints with an Impressionist's sense of light. He tells REBECCA WILLIS about the seven wonders of his world

Mud houses in Sana'a, Yemen

BUILDING

These tall houses in the Yemen are like blocks of flats made out of mud. They are built to a design two millennia old, and feel like something from the medieval age, in a time warp. They were completely different from anything I'd ever seen before and a complete shock to my system.

Sennen Cove, Cornwall

BEACH

I love Sennen on the north coast of Cornwall. It is England's western-most beach—Land's End is just beyond. I've been painting it for 40 years and it never ceases to fascinate me. In winter it's empty and in August it's about a square foot per person, but it's still visual. I tend to paint *contre-jour* (against the light)—because I'm basically a tonal painter There used to be a Punch and Judy show on the beach, and when the show was finished the mothers would say to their children, "Now go and watch the gentleman painting," and they'd all come over to look at me instead. I was the alternative entertainment

Shiv Niwas Palace, Udaipur

HOTEL

Staying here feels like being a maharajah. You could only find somewhere like this in Rajasthan. It is incredibly romantic—even more so than the Danieli or the Cipriani in Venice. You eat around an ornamental pool in a wonderful courtyard while musicians play their sitars

Trekking in Nepal

JOURNEY

The first time I went trekking in Nepal was with a British Gurkha colonel called Peter Duffel, who was writing a book about the Gurkhas and had asked me to do the drawings for it. He was doing a "pension trek", to distribute pensions from the British government to the Gurkhas, some of whom lived in remote villages and had no banking facilities. When we arrived at one village the people thought I was the colonel's memsahib because I had long hair at the time This drawing is of a Damai band playing—the Damai are the caste of musicians and artists. Later I went on a private trek with my late wife, Chrissie. We trekked from Pohkara to Ghurka and apart from our group we didn't see another person for a week

From the Accademia Bridge looking towards the Salute, Venice

VIEW

People say you can't paint Venice because it has been done before, but Venice is like a tree or a beautiful woman or a wonderful landscape—it changes all the time. It is a magical place that has always drawn artists to it. I'm always excited to go there and when I leave I am wondering when I can go back. I've been there over 50 times—I have a studio in Canareggio, where the Venetians live—and yet it has never palled.

KEN HOWARD, ALAMY, BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY, EYEVINE

Udine, Italy

CITY

Udine is in the north-east of Italy close to Trieste, near the border with Slovenia. It is the main city of Friuli, an area with its own language, Friulan. My wife, Dora, comes from there. Years before I met her properly, I painted her sitting on the fountain in the main square. The piazza is perfect for painting, there are no motor vehicles, so the view is not broken by great lumps of metal. Vehicles are so invasive —the smell, the noise, visually.

Las Meninas by Velázquez

ART

I have no hesitation about choosing this—it would be my desert-island picture. It is important to me because I am a British painter very influenced by French painters, who were very influenced by Spanish painters—Manet, for instance, was influenced by Velázquez and Goya. I think Velázquez is the greatest colourist of all time, yet he paints with blacks and browns and greys (which I prefer to call silver!)—his palette relates to mine. Las Meninas is in the Prado; when I first went to Madrid in 1952 I spent six weeks in Spain and £25 in money, including travel (I mostly hitch-hiked).

WILL SMITH learns to do something new.
No 2: **GOLF**

THE MISSION

FOOTBALL INVOLVES A lot of running around and people trying to stamp on your feet. Rugby involves a lot of running around and people trying to stamp on your scrotum. Cricket involves a maniac hurling a piece of red concrete at every part of you. But golf: golf could be the sport for me. There's no body-contact, and it involves strolling round a large garden. Plus, along with heroin and Britney-baiting, it's one of the West's most highly addictive pastimes. There must be something in it.

Until now, I'd played only one game, at a dodgy hotel in Norfolk. The course was on scrubland, we had only a vague idea of the rules and our bags emptied their clubs at the slightest tilt, leaving us scrabbling about like a vaudeville troupe in a silent movie. This time, I sign up for a day's instruction at Wentworth in Surrey, one of the most prestigious clubs in Britain. The course is set within acres of beautiful countryside, with an elegant, lord-of-the-manor clubhouse and lovingly manicured gardens. Basically, it's like being at a National Trust property without all the reluctant kids.

First up was the grip. During my one previous game, I simply grabbed the club in my fists and swung at the ball so hard that, if I missed, I whirled off balance like a drunken gymnast. Now my instructor tells me the grip is key. It involves some bizarre, Masonic crossing of the fingers. And you have to hold the club loosely. I liked this line of instruction. It made me feel very Zen/Jedi.

Now the absolute revelation to me, and I believe the reason for golf's addictive appeal, is the sheer satisfaction of whacking a tiny ball vast distances. There is great joy in the precision of connecting the small head of a club with an even smaller ball. There's the glow of coming to the correct finishing position, eyes fixed in the middle distance as you watch the ball arc across the course. It perfectly marries the ancient human need to hit things really hard with the modern consensus that we don't do that sort of thing anymore. All the energies that in the past would have gone into chopping someone's head off in battle have now been subsumed into golf.

I went on doing this for a couple of hours, during which time there was a marked improvement in my control over direction and distance. Then came the putting. This was slightly less satisfying at first, but maybe that was because my bloodlust was really up. As my inner Saxon warrior subsided, the Radio 4 listener fused into my DNA came to the fore and I became enamoured with the beauty of the finely trimmed lawn that is the putting green. You crouch down, scanning its undulations like a general surveying the field of battle. A gentle tap; and then the gurgle of the ball going in. Now I'm no longer an axe-wielding battle hero; now I'm a sniper quietly taking aim from the roof.

Then we started on the course, and the thing that most excited me about golf as a child: the buggies, the mode of transport at all superbases in Roger Moore Bonds. They are actually a bit like a milkfloat. But my adult self was still excited. They have GPS! And a computerised map of the course! And a distance counter that ticks down as you drive around! If you're not into golf, you can make yourself useful tracking down a rogue agent.

Wentworth's course, one of the finest in the world, has hosted some of the most famous players in the game. And me. Ben said we would do just the first hole. Good call. For me to try all 18 would have been like London's Olympic bid —a lot of promises and expectations followed by eye-widening horror at the actual reality.

I had to hit it off the tee in front of the clubhouse, in front of people watching who play for a living. Believe me, that's a lot of pressure. The ball landed in the rough. Then I hit it out of the rough on the left—into the rough on the right. Then out of the rough—into the bunker. I felt like a central European in 1945: "Hooray, the Nazis have gone! Ah—here come the Russians..."

Still, five strokes later, my ball plopped into the hole. Suddenly I understood the addiction—golf combines stately homes, gardens, off-road driving and hitting things with sticks. All my hobbies in one. ■

Next issue: Soufflés

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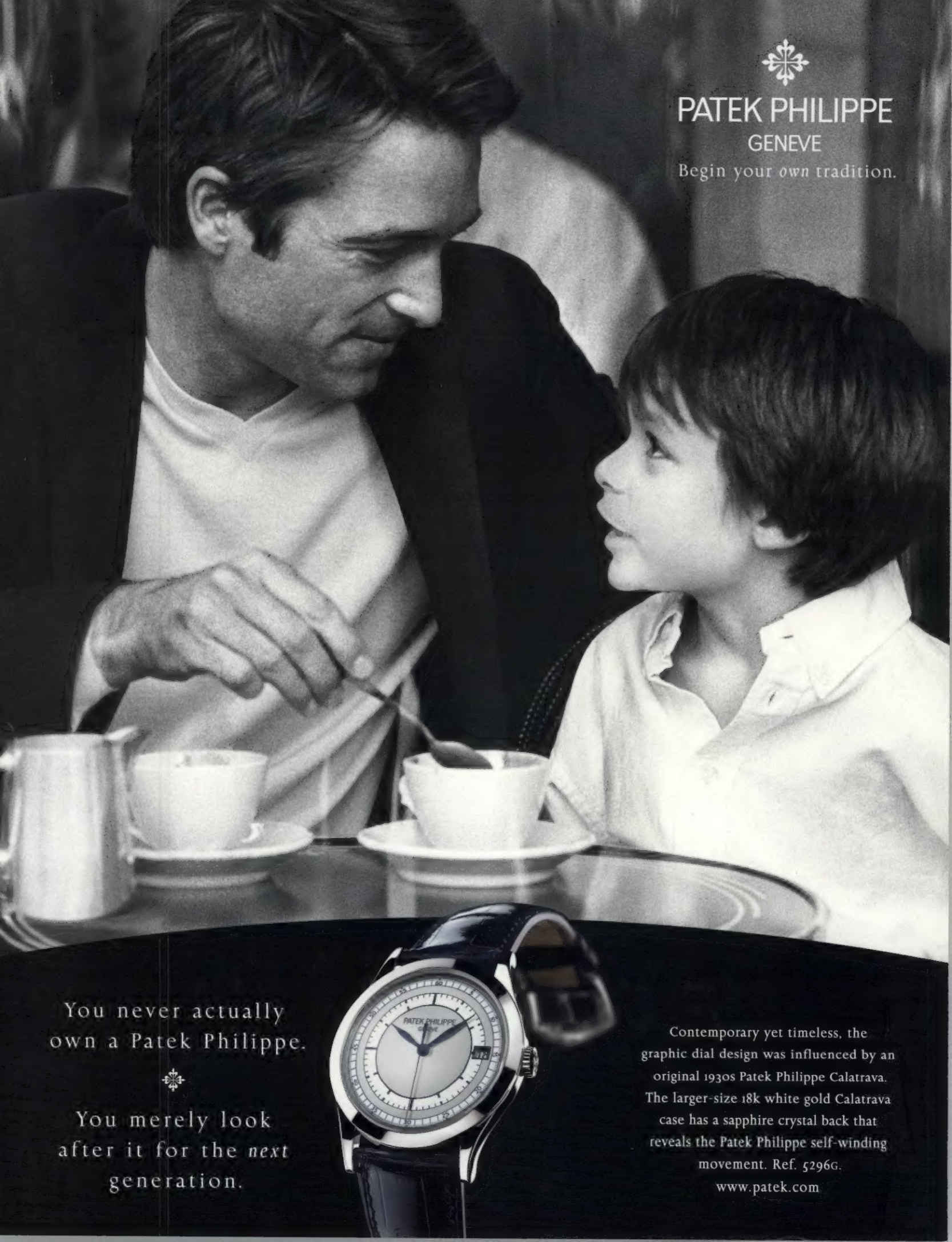
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